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THE THEME OF INITIATION AND THE FORMAL SOCIAL
OCCASION IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

by



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ABSTRACT

Jane Austen's novels achieve their full resonance through the reconciliation of a narrow social purpose with a broad archetypal framework. At one level, Jane Austen discusses the problems facing particular young women in the course of making their entry into genteel society. At the other, by ensuring that the transition is successfully accomplished in every case, she re-creates the basic pattern of separation, transition and initiation that characterises all ritual, myth and fairytale. While all of Jane Austen's novels thus make very similar appeals to the reader's unconscious, because of the very varied manner in which the author deals with her specific heroines and their social situations, in detail, they constitute unique artistic creations. In Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility Jane Austen establishes her basic themes and concerns but does so in a rather simple manner. However, in Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion, Jane Austen creates much more complex heroines, situated within highly localised worlds, and establishes a much stronger sense of the interplay between the individual heroines and their communities.

Since they are located within genteel village communities and since they cannot assume the more active role of the man, these initiate heroines are tested mainly according to the quality of their manners. Thus, the formal social occasion,

during which the usual patterns of polite intercourse are intensified considerably, has a particularly crucial role to play in Jane Austen's novels. In the first two Jane Austen is clearly aware of the importance of the formal social occasion as a testing ground for her heroines, but does not seem to have realised fully its possibilities as a structural agent. However, in the next three novels she not only uses the formal social occasion as a testing ground but also ensures that proper emphasis is given to the most important parts of her action by crystallising it within a few fully developed scenes involving balls, dinners and visits and patterns these scenes in such a way that they provide the structural basis of the novels of which they are a part. It is only in Persuasion, in which Jane Austen seems to have lost faith in the communal ideal that she has been defending in her other novels, that the formal social occasion assumes a less important role. However, even here, she demonstrates an acute realisation of the advantages to be gained from organising her action around a few fully realised group encounters.

Working always within the framework offered by a basic archetypal situation, Jane Austen learnt in the course of her artistic career to make increasingly subtle examinations of the relationship between the individual and his world and to embody these examinations in an increasingly refined structure.

TEXTUAL NOTE

All references to Jane Austen's fictional works and letters are included in the text of this thesis and are cited from Chapman's editions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. <u>NORTHANGER ABBEY</u>	23
III. <u>SENSE AND SENSIBILITY</u>	63
IV. <u>PRIDE AND PREJUDICE</u>	116
V. <u>MANSFIELD PARK</u>	157
VI. <u>EMMA</u>	197
VII. <u>PERSUASION</u>	254
VIII. CONCLUSION	289
FOOTNOTES	297
BIBLIOGRAPHY	305

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen's novels, as Joseph Cady and Ian Watt point out, have evoked widely differing critical responses.¹ In the opinion of most nineteenth-century critics, a few of this century, and probably most casual readers, she is nothing more than an accurate realist who lacks the ability to move outside of her immediate environment or inside the skins of her finely mannered characters. This approach is typified by an unsigned notice of Emma in The Gentleman's Magazine which notes approvingly that "it delineates with great accuracy the habits and manners of a middle class of gentry; and of the inhabitants of a country village at one degree of rank and gentility beneath them," but concludes with the faint praise that "it is amusing, if not instructive; and has no tendency to deteriorate the heart."² Charlotte Brontë's response to the limitations of Pride and Prejudice, which she describes as an "accurate daguerrotyped portrait of a commonplace face"³ is rather less complaisant, and she concludes of Emma, that it is the product of a temperament which does not possess "anything like warmth or enthusiasm; anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt."⁴ In this century several critics have also based their hostile critical stance on the social and temperamental limitations of Jane Austen's world. H.W. Garrod, for example, sums up his sweeping attacks on Jane Austen's mind, morality

and fictional scope in the following terms:

It would be difficult to name a writer of similar eminence who possessed so little knowledge of literature and history, whose experience of life was so narrowly and contentedly confined, whose interests were at once so acute and so small, whose ideals were so irredeemably humdrum.⁵

E.N. Hayes and Angus Wilson offer comments of a similar nature.⁶ Hayes claims that Emma is a flawed novel because Jane Austen omits the aristocracy and the poor, and thus avoids a full discussion of the class conflict at which she hints, and because her marriage plots are stunted by a failure to talk about love, while Angus Wilson states that the limitation of her subject matter does not provide a valuable discipline, as it might for some novelists, but rather deforms and distorts her art.

While reiterating views that would have gained ready acceptance in the nineteenth century, these three writers, as Wilson admits himself, are at odds with the majority of modern commentators, who argue that the narrowness of Jane Austen's artistic range does serve to discipline rather than to deform her art. Indeed, it can be argued with some justification that twentieth-century criticism of Jane Austen's work comprises an extremely diverse and far-reaching gloss of George Saintsbury's seminal comment that "if her world is a microcosm, the cosmic quality of it is at least as eminent as the littleness."⁷ In searching for the exact nature of this "cosmic quality" critics have analysed Jane Austen's work according to social, psychoanalytical and mythopoeic criteria.

By analysing her novels in relation to the standards operating in the period about which she was writing, critics have established quite firmly that Jane Austen's social implications extend far beyond the village communities which are her immediate subject. Thus, Richard Poirier, using Mark Twain as his touchstone, argues that much modern antipathy towards Jane Austen derives from a failure to understand that she is engaged at once in defending a peculiarly eighteenth-century conservative communal ideal of existence and, in more general terms, in examining the role of manners in society.⁸ The importance of manners in Jane Austen's novels is also emphasised by Lionel Trilling and Howard S. Babb. Indeed, Babb's lengthy analysis of the subtle implications of polite conversation is, as he states himself, nothing more than an elaboration of Trilling's comment that "the great novelists knew that manners indicate the largest intentions of men's souls as well as the smallest and they are perpetually concerned to catch the meaning of every dim implicit hint."⁹ The communal ideal to which Poirier refers is the subject of several excellent essays. Tony Tanner, for example, defends Fanny Price's passivity on the grounds that it contains within it the kind of moral strength needed to resist "the world of frantic change [that] was about to supplant the world of peaceful fixity she knew,"¹⁰ and Joseph M. Duffy Jr. sums up his view of Emma in the following manner:

Confidence in the general health of society diminishes the significance of the irritation with particulars. This

confidence radiates upon society and upon the individual. . . . Emma, throughout, is luminous with the immanence of life. This central and essential confidence endows the characters and incidents in the novel with an Olympian remoteness and clarity that we often associate with epic tales of demi-gods and heroes.¹¹

However, while this stress on Jane Austen's relevance to her contemporary situation opens up the way for meaningful discussion of the novels, it does not in itself explain their universal quality. Thus, despite its many virtues, Elliot Rubinstein's exhaustive analysis of the literary and social concepts at work in Jane Austen's novels is somewhat lacking as an appraisal of her total achievement.¹²

Critics have moved in two main directions in trying to define exactly why a writer whose work is so much a product of a particular time and place should have more than an historical or aesthetic appeal for the modern reader. Although it raises many intriguing possibilities, the psycho-analytical approach has proved to be the less convincing response to the problem of establishing the nature of Jane Austen's universal qualities. Geoffrey Gorer, for example, in arguing that Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park and Emma are all characterised by the Oedipus theme, the heroines hating their mothers and loving their fathers, is forced to postulate several rather tenuous hypotheses about Jane Austen's relationship with her family, to exaggerate Elizabeth Bennet's dislike of her mother and to wilfully misinterpret the affectionate relationship that exists between Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters.¹³ E. Margaret Moore, who advances the theory that "early experience of

maternal deprivation colors Jane Austen's mature attitude to human relationships,"¹⁴ relies on a similar combination of speculations about the author's childhood experiences and sometimes perverse readings of her novels.

Duffy, who, as the quotation cited earlier suggests, perceives a certain mythopoeic quality in Jane Austen's work, makes a more successful attempt at establishing the nature of Jane Austen's archetypal patterns than do either of these two psychoanalytically orientated critics. What he recognises is that, while Jane Austen's "confidence in the general health of society" clearly derives from the prevailing mood of conservative thought of her own time, it is also more generally consistent with the optimistic tone of the myth or the fairytale. Duffy pursues the same line of argument in his analysis of Persuasion, to which he attributes a fairytale plot.¹⁵ Avrom Fleishman, who argues that Fanny Price is like Cinderella, and D. W. Harding, who perceives the presence of the Cinderella theme in all of her novels, have approached Jane Austen in a similar fashion.¹⁶ However, both analyses are somewhat less satisfactory than Duffy's, the former because it tends to separate rather than to integrate social and mythical considerations, and the latter because it is concerned only with tracing superficial parallels between Jane Austen's novels and the fairytale.

It will be my aim in this thesis to follow the approach established by Duffy and to show how Jane Austen's novels achieve their resonance through the reconciliation of

a broad archetypal pattern and a narrow social purpose. However, by structuring each chapter around the heroine's entry into the adult world, with the exception of that on Persuasion which deals with the already mature Anne Elliot's attempts to find a new world, I will be concerned with stressing the ritualistic rather than the more obviously mythical aspects of the novels. By making this change of emphasis, I hope to be able to establish in a rather different manner than does Duffy the nature of the connection between Jane Austen's universal and particular statements of faith in the health of the social organism.

The narrow social purpose of the rituals which accompany the individual's transition from group to group and from one stage of life to the next in all primitive societies is very obvious. By completely cutting off the initiate from the life patterns both of the group or stage which he is leaving and of that into which he is entering, the community provides a period of transition, during which, as Campbell puts it, "are enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate."¹⁷ Thus, the essential purpose of the rites of passage, as Arnold van Gennep describes it, is "to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined."¹⁸ Since its standards are never more severely tested than during the period of disequilibrium brought about by the attempts to effect a successful transition, such ceremonies are crucial not only

to the individual involved in them but also to the society. While the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation around which these rites are structured¹⁹ are not so clearly defined in the process that takes her heroines from the childhood to the adult world as they are in primitive communities, such a pattern can be perceived in all of Jane Austen's novels. Catherine Morland, for example, is first of all separated from the family group by moving from her home in Fullerton to Bath, is then educated in the ways of her society during a number of formal social occasions which serve as initiation rituals, and, finally, having achieved maturity, marries Henry Tilney and takes her place in the adult world. While none of Jane Austen's other heroines is separated quite so decisively from her family as Catherine Morland, each makes a series of movements away from the home by attending balls and dinners or by going on visits, and thus undergoes a similar process of education and testing. In every case, the successfully accomplished transition is marked by entry into the marriage state.

Although the basic ritual can thus be reduced to any one of an infinite number of individual situations, and although there is no guarantee that every initiate will make the transition successfully, implicit in its unvarying tripartite structure is a general assertion of faith in the ability of man to progress successfully from one stage of life to another. As Joseph Campbell points out, ritual is like myth, which indeed follows a similar pattern of separation,

transition and incorporation, in that it derives from man's unconscious and supplies "the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back."²⁰ Thus, the ritual is intended essentially to establish the same condition of perfect harmony between the individual and the world around him that characterises the conclusion of every myth:

The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).²¹

Although Jane Austen places her heroines in very specific social situations, the completely successful nature of their final integration into the adult world indicates that she was aware, at least unconsciously, of the mythical dimensions of the initiation ritual. Indeed, it might be said that Jane Austen's novels are mythopoeic stories, reduced first of all to a ritualistic basis and then further reduced to extremely localised initiatory situations. Thus, although Jane Austen eschews the generalised and symbolic mode of ritual, myth and fairy-tale, her tales of the manner in which certain genteel young ladies achieve maturity within the context of eighteenth-century village society are no less universal in their implications.

Within the broad ritualistic framework established by the structure of the separate chapters it will be the task of this thesis to show that both the particular ideal

against which all of Jane Austen's heroines are judged and the manner in which they are called upon to prove themselves are products of the conservative thought of her own age. Only by doing this is it possible to understand how inextricably bound together are the archetypal and narrowly social aspects of Jane Austen's novels.

For Jane Austen, the exact nature of the perfection of which man is capable is embodied in her society's concept of the gentleman. The virtues required by this ideal can be summed up by the Roman term pietas which, as Simon Raven puts it,

. . . represented a man's inalienable duty to honor his father and mother, preserve the house which had been built by his ancestors, pay homage to the ancient gods of Rome, and pay equal homage to the institutions which gods and ancestors had together devised for their own lasting glory and his temporary benefit. It was a conservative ideal, inculcating courage, temperance and something more than respect for the established way of life, and, demanding strict discipline, it promised in return, increase and good order.²²

Although Chamberlyne extended the title "gentleman" to embrace anyone who maintained himself without labour,²³ the duties outlined above were so demanding that it was generally felt in the eighteenth century that only those who derived sufficient unearned income from landownership to be free from the necessity of earning a living had the leisure to cultivate the characteristic gentlemanly virtues. In other words, to be described as a gentleman one usually had to belong to the gentry, the untitled landed class, or the aristocracy. The moral and social terms "gentleman" and "member of the gentry" thus tended to be synonymous

during this period. Although not all leisured gentlemen fulfilled the standards of social behaviour demanded of them, they seem to have behaved sufficiently well as a group to justify the position of great prestige granted to them by the rest of society. In contrast to their French counterparts, who equated rank with privilege, the English nobility and gentry revealed a remarkable concern for duty and engaged themselves zealously in national and local government, the armed forces and the administration of their estates. This rather literal equation between rank and worth made it extremely difficult for any members of the middle class, except for those belonging to the highest professions and occupations, whose social claims were great enough to compensate for their suspected lack of gentlemanly virtues, to be considered gentlemen. The subtle discriminations which inevitably operated in dividing the middle classes into gentlemen and common people are well illustrated by Perkin, who points out that

The gentlemen included . . . the clergyman, physician, barrister, but not always the Dissenting minister, the apothecary, the attorney, or the school-master; the overseas merchant but not the inland trader; the amateur author, painter, musician, but rarely the professional.²⁴

Jane Austen's novels provide excellent examples of all the social and moral implications of the term "gentleman." In Pride and Prejudice she is concerned to show that the nobility, as represented by Darcy, and the gentry, as represented by Elizabeth Bennet, share the same gentlemanly concepts of duty and obligation to others, while in Emma she

demonstrates how people of bourgeois origin, like the Coles, can attain to the rank of gentleman by assuming a leisured role in life and cultivating the proper virtues. In general, however, she tends to narrow her definition somewhat, for, with the exception of those cited above and a few others, such as the Gardiners, all of Jane Austen's characters who qualify morally as gentlemen either belong to the gentry, are professional men with genteel relations, like Mr. John Knightley, or are members of the Baronetcy, the order immediately above the gentry. Jane Austen restricts her scope in this way because she wants to concentrate her attention on the group which she believes best represents the gentlemanly ideal which she is defending. Perhaps biased slightly by her own position within the gentry,²⁵ Jane Austen seems to feel that for every nouveau riche Mr. Cole who acquires gentility, there is a persistently vulgar Mrs. Elton, and for every aristocrat, such as Darcy, who understands the essential equation between rank and duty, there is a snobbish Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who regards her position in life as a source of privilege.²⁶ Only the gentry are sufficiently detached from trade on one side and of sufficiently low rank on the other to understand clear-sightedly their moral responsibilities. While some of her gentlefolk and lesser aristocrats do, of course, deviate from the ideal of the gentleman it is from this narrow sector of society that all of Jane Austen's heroes and heroines, with the exception of Darcy, derive. Catherine Morland is the daughter of a clergyman who possesses

"a considerable independence, besides two good livings" (Northanger Abbey, 13); the Dashwood sisters, although impoverished themselves, belong to a family that owns a large estate; Elizabeth Bennet's father has an estate worth £2,000 a year; Fanny Price is properly the adopted daughter of Sir Thomas Bertram, owner of Mansfield Park; Emma Woodhouse is a member of an extremely wealthy and long established family; and Anne Elliot is the daughter of the baronet owner of Kellynch Hall. Similarly, Henry Tilney is the younger son of General Tilney, the owner of Northanger Abbey; Edward Ferrars is a clergyman and heir to £10,000; Colonel Brandon possesses the Barton Park estate; Edmund Bertram is the younger son of Sir Thomas; Mr. Knightley is a considerable landed gentleman; and Captain Wentworth, while deriving from a relatively obscure family, has improved his status through successful active service.²⁷

So concerned is Jane Austen with demonstrating that her society revolves around the ideal of the gentleman, particularly as it is embodied in members of the gentry, that she refuses to recognise, at least in her novels, that by the turn of the century the old order was being seriously challenged by groups adhering to very different standards. The selfishly individualistic and narrowly acquisitive characters in her novels might possess some of the main attributes of the new bourgeois forces, but they are almost all deviant members of the existing order rather than representatives of a rival interest. The challenge to the status quo thus comes

from within rather than from without and her world is brought much nearer to destruction by Sir Walter Elliot, a landowner of long standing, than by the vulgar, bourgeois intruder, Mrs. Elton. So long as the ideal of the gentleman survives Jane Austen seems confident that her society can withstand any challenge from without.

Since only the man can fulfill all the obligations of the gentleman in a male orientated society it might seem odd at first sight that Jane Austen chose to centre her novels on the Catherine Morlands, Elizabeth Bennets and Emma Woodhouses of her world rather than the Henry Tilneys, Darcys and Mr. Knightleys. Emma is called upon to behave dutifully towards her father and to show a concern for the people of Highbury, but, unlike Mr. Knightley, can never carry out the tasks allotted to the landlord or the justice of the peace. However, Jane Austen is acutely aware that the gentleman is called upon to prove himself not only by demonstrating his worth in these capacities but also by showing a potentiality for such behaviour on all occasions. While this potentiality can be reflected in a purely symbolic manner by the dignity of a man's house or carriage,²⁸ it can be displayed much more effectively by his good manners since such simple actions as opening a door for a lady show a concern for, and ability to serve, others as surely as does an involvement in great national affairs. Indeed, it might be argued that, whereas the importance of the situation would inspire any reasonably dutiful man to act correctly when he is involved in his

judicial or military function, only the most alert of social beings can understand the implications of this permanent obligation to behave properly. For this reason, Mr. Knightley must be considered Jane Austen's finest gentleman because he conducts himself impeccably on all occasions and is as attentive to Harriet Smith's needs at the Crown ball as he is to the administration of his estate. Darcy, on the other hand, has to learn that his polite obligations are no less important than the duty that he owes to his family and tenants. Thus, while the progress of Jane Austen's heroines towards their society's gentlemanly ideal is gauged mainly according to their response to the laws of polite conduct, they are in many ways more thoroughly tested than the most active of sailors or politicians. By their performance in formal situations, Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, and Emma Woodhouse reveal that they fall short of their society's gentlemanly ideal because, in their different ways, they fail to respect the needs of others, and Catherine Morland and Fanny Price because they are unable to serve these needs. The pattern of testing is altered only in Persuasion, during which Anne Elliot, faced with a society that has ceased to comprehend the subtle implications of manners, is forced to prove herself by more active means.

Thus, implicit in Jane Austen's belief that manners have a crucial role to play in defining, and hence preserving, the gentlemanly ideal around which her society revolves is an equation between the polite behaviour of the individual and

the moral health of the whole nation. Only once, in one of her earliest works, does Jane Austen make this equation explicit, and, even then, as is the case with most of the *Juvenilia*, the point is very nearly lost beneath the comic exaggeration of the surface. The incident in question arises in "Catharine" when the heroine argues with her aunt about the significance to be attached to what she considers to be a trivial piece of impropriety:

"But I plainly see that every thing is going to sixes and sevens and all order will soon be at an end throughout the kingdom."

"Not however Ma'am the sooner, I hope, from any conduct of mine, said Catherine in a tone of great humility, for upon my honour I have done nothing this evening that can contribute to overthrow the establishment of the kingdom."

"You are Mistaken Child, replied she; the welfare of every Nation depends upon the virtue of it's individuals, and any one who offends in so gross a manner against decorum and propriety is certainly hastening its ruin. You have been giving a bad example to the World, and the World is but too well disposed to receive such." (Minor Works, 232-233)

Jane Austen is, of course, by no means unique in the large claims that she makes for manners. In her own age, Edmund Burke was acutely aware of their function as a readily comprehended moral language:

Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in a great measure, the laws depend. The law touches us but here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarise or refine us. . . . They give their whole form and colour to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them.²⁹

Nor is it the worst effect of this unnatural contention [the American War of Independence], that our laws are corrupted. Whilst manners remain entire, they will correct the vices of law, and soften it at length to their own temper. But we have to lament, that in most of the late proceedings we see very few traces of that generosity, humanity, and dignity of mind, which formerly characterised this nation. War suspends the rules of moral obligation, and what is long suspended is

in danger of being totally abrogated. Civil wars strike deepest of all into the manners of the people. They vitiate their politics; they corrupt their morals; they pervert even the natural taste and relish of equity and justice.³⁰

In more general terms Berger and Luckman have pointed out that, whereas the system of manners often means little in complex societies in which there is a segmentation of the institutional order and a fragmentation of knowledge, it is of special importance in any closely knit society in which it can be assumed that most members of the group will have a knowledge of the values at work.³¹

Lest it be felt that Jane Austen and Edmund Burke were making too much of the role played by manners in the eighteenth century, it might be pointed out that when Beau Nash wished to transform the extremely vulgar and sometimes violent city of Bath into a respectable watering place he relied, with some success, on the introduction of an extremely rigid system of etiquette to bring about the necessary improvement.³² Nash's rather special case serves to emphasise that, at least implicitly, manners were always regarded in the eighteenth century as a means of propagating an ideal of existence and, conversely, of combatting chaos and disorder.

In a society where it was felt that manners provided an accurate guide to moral worth, the formal social occasion, with its particularly strict codes of behaviour and its intensification of the patterns of human intercourse, acquired an especially important function. The concern with formality that characterised Jane Austen's age is amply demonstrated by P. J. S. Richardson's account of the balls held at Bath under the auspices of Nash:

Each ball was to open with a minuet danced by two persons of

the highest distinction present. The lady then retired to her seat and Mr. Nash brought the gentleman a new partner. This ceremony was to be observed by every succeeding couple, every gentleman being obliged to dance with two ladies till the minuets, which generally lasted two hours, were over. At eight the country dances were to begin, ladies of quality, according to their rank, standing up first. At nine came a short interval for rest and tea. Country dances were then resumed until the clock struck eleven when, even if in the middle of a dance, the ball terminated.³³

The English dinner party, as de la Rochefoucauld points out, was characterised by a similar concern for ceremony:

At four o'clock precisely . . . you must present yourself in the drawing room with a great deal more ceremony than we are accustomed to in France. This sudden change of social manners is quite astonishing and I was deeply struck by it. In the morning you came down in riding-boots and a shabby coat, you sit where you like, you behave as if you were by yourself, no one takes any notice of you, and it is all extremely comfortable. But in the evening, unless you have just arrived, you must be well washed and well groomed. The standard of politeness is uncomfortably high--strangers go first into the dining room and sit near the hostess and are served in order of seniority in accordance with a rigid etiquette.³⁴

It is thus inevitable that the formal social occasion should play a large part, both thematically and structurally, in Jane Austen's novels. Not only does it serve in general as a testing ground for all of Jane Austen's characters, but, as has already been pointed out, it also takes on a significance for her heroines, engaged as they are in making their entry into the adult world, equal to that accorded to initiation rites amongst primitive peoples. Armed only with what has been taught them of firm moral values and socially pleasing accomplishments within the home environment, the heroines find themselves faced with a microcosm of the adult world in which extremely heavy demands are made on the individual's ability to act correctly and to interrelate with those around

him. Jane Austen's awareness of the great emotional trials that are experienced by a young woman for whom the formal social occasion serves to effect the transition from one world to another is reflected most clearly in "A Collection of Letters":

This mighty affair is now happily over, and my Girls are out. As the moment approached for our departure, you can have no idea how the sweet Creatures trembled with fear and expectation. Before the Carriage drove to the door, I called them into my dressing room, and as soon as they were seated thus addressed them. "My dear Girls the moment is now arrived when I am to reap the rewards of all my Anxieties and labours towards you during your Education. You are this Evening to enter a World in which you will meet with many wonderfull Things; Yet let me warn you against suffering yourselves to be meanly swayed by the follies and Vices of others, for beleive me my beloved Children that if you do--I shall be very sorry for it." (Minor Works, 151)

The "mighty affair" to which the mother attaches so much importance is, in actual fact, an evening of tea-drinking with Mrs. Cope and her daughter. Despite the exaggerated and rather frenetic tone of this particular passage, it does help to define the serious manner in which we should respond to the social rituals in Jane Austen's mature works.

Although Jane Austen does not make any rigid correlation between particular rituals and particular tests but, rather, uses every formal occasion in a variety of ways, it can perhaps be asserted that for the heroine, at least, the dance serves most specifically as a courtship ritual, since it is within this context that Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney, Darcy and Elizabeth, and Emma and Mr. Knightley either begin to learn or actually achieve mutual respect and admiration; the extended visit or the short excursion serves

to test and strengthen the heroine's values by exposing her to new moral environments, the most notable examples of this being Catherine Morland's visit to Northanger Abbey, Elizabeth Bennet's visits to Rosings and Pemberley, Fanny Price's excursion to Sotherton and her visit to Portsmouth, and Anne Elliot's visits to Uppercross, Lyme and Bath; and the dinner and the evening party are used for more general testing.

The formal social occasion serves as a rather neutral background against which the polite action is played out in the early novels. However, as Jane Austen's artistic skills developed so she began to make much more significant use of the individual ritual and to organise these rituals in such a way that they provided the structural basis of the novels of which they were a part. Jane Austen moves so rapidly from scene to scene in Northanger Abbey, from the ball to the pump room, to the theatre and back to the ball again, that the reader has some difficulty in isolating those episodes which are of especial significance to the moral development of the heroine. Only the climax of the action, which is precipitated by Catherine's removal to Northanger Abbey, is given proper emphasis. Sense and Sensibility is similarly flawed by a superfluity of formal social occasions and the various stages of Marianne's progress towards maturity can only be charted with any sureness around the larger units of her visits to London and Cleveland. Pride and Prejudice includes almost as many partially

realised scenes as either of the two earlier works and appears, at first sight, to be organised, as they are, simply around a few important dances and two changes of location. However, it is, in fact, aesthetically much more satisfying because even the briefest formal encounters between Darcy and Elizabeth reflect the novel's overall pattern of approach and rejection and thus have an organic part to play in its total structure. The later novels, on the other hand, depend almost entirely upon the presentation of a few very fully realised scenes. Thus, Mansfield Park is structured around the excursion to Sotherton, the theatricals, Fanny's first ball, and the visit to Portsmouth, and Emma around the Westons' Christmas party, the Coles' dinner party, Emma's own dinner party, the Crown ball, the day at Donwell Abbey and the excursion to Box Hill. Even in Persuasion, in which the circumstances of her plot force Jane Austen for the most part to eschew the formal social occasion, the action is not only structured around Anne's movement from Kellynch to Uppercross, to Lyme, and to Bath, but also more closely around several crucial group situations, the most important of which are the social evening at Uppercross during which Anne finds herself painfully separated from Wentworth, the walk to Winthrop, the unfortunate incident on the Cobb, the scene in the shop at Bath, the evening of the concert, and Anne's two visits to the White Hart.

So well wrought are some of the scenes describing individual formal social occasions that they have been

extracted from the novels in which they play such an integral part and cited as examples of Jane Austen's art at its best. Although the excursion to Sotherton and the amateur theatricals in Mansfield Park, with their subtle symbolic implications and complex of interrelationships, have most frequently been the subject of such special attention,³⁵ many others, such as the Crown ball and the trip to Donwell Abbey in Emma and the walk to Winthrop in Persuasion, are of an almost equally high standard. With the possible exception of the ball during which Henry Tilney draws subtle analogies between dancing and courtship, and the visit to Northanger Abbey, no one scene in either Northanger Abbey or Sense and Sensibility approaches the quality of those cited above.

The story of Jane Austen's novels is to a large extent the story of the way in which her heroines acquit themselves during these initiatory social rituals. Their movement is like that of a person stepping from one calmly-floating boat to another. Forced out of the childhood environment in which she had an assured place, the young woman finds herself and the world around her suddenly plunged into a state of disequilibrium. While perched precariously between the two worlds she must at the same time learn to distinguish between the true and false values at work in her new sphere and to correct her personal faults. It is, of course, her society's complex structure of manners, particularly as it operates within the context of the formal social occasion, that helps the heroine to achieve full moral definition and,

eventually, to rest quietly in the second boat. The successfully accomplished transition is mutually beneficial to the heroine and to her world. She finds herself in the fullest possible manner by achieving harmony with those around her and, by temporarily disorientating the stable environment into which she enters, forces those within it to reassess themselves and their values. The process is thus one of education for the heroine and re-evaluation for the group. The stability with which we are presented at the end is significantly different from that which existed at the beginning, even if the surface of life has only been disturbed by a few marriages. In the original situation facing the heroine, the ideal of the gentleman has often been undercut by the failings of individuals like Sir Thomas Bertram, or has gone untested for too long in a smoothly operating world like that of Highbury. However, it is fully reasserted as a result of the interplay between the initiate heroine and the adult world. It is through this statement of faith in the communal ideal of her own society that Jane Austen draws out the full implications of the ritualistic structure of her novels. Heavily embedded as they are in the way of life and the ideals of a particular time and place, Jane Austen's novels nevertheless possess much of the appeal of myth and are thus emotionally satisfying to any reader who can perceive the universal issues that lie beneath the precise surface.

CHAPTER II

NORTHANGER ABBEY

The extended parody of the Gothic novel that runs through Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey has not, on the whole, tempted critics to assign it a place with her Juvenilia rather than with her other novels. Although the Gothic interpretation of events provided by the narrator in the early chapters and by Catherine during her visit to Northanger Abbey does not fit comfortably into the novel's structure it is not extraneous to the author's main concerns. W.A. Craik thus does little justice to Jane Austen's artistic skill by claiming that Isabella Thorpe is simply a product of her literary burlesque intentions.¹ Walton Litz's view that the Gothic motif is merely one movement in a complex drama of illusion and recognition seems to come much closer to defining the nature of the novel's achievement.² It will be the object of this chapter to establish quite firmly that Northanger Abbey is not only something rather more substantial than a parody of the Gothic novel but that, because of its concern with the moral and social development of Catherine Morland, and because of its stress on the important part played by manners and the formal social occasion in aiding this development, it is to be granted a place within the canon of Jane Austen's mature work. Although Jane Austen does not handle Catherine Morland's development towards maturity with the

sureness and delicacy that she displays in her treatment of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, she is not guilty of presenting the crudely conceived and static ingénue cum self-appointed Gothic heroine postulated by Marvin Mudrick.³

Similarly, while no one scene in Northanger Abbey is comparable in its complexity to the Sotherton excursion in Mansfield Park or to the Crown ball in Emma, Jane Austen nevertheless displays a considerable awareness of the structural possibilities of the formal social occasion.

In the first half of her novel, which takes place in and around Bath, it is Jane Austen's task to introduce her heroine to the larger world outside of the family group, and she therefore plunges her into a series of balls and visits to the Pump Room and the theatre. Only by following her progress through, and performance during, these polite group functions can the reader hope to understand either the way in which Catherine is tested or the nature of the essential differences between the Tilney and Thorpe influences that vie for her affection and allegiance. So irreconcilable are these two forces, morally, that Jane Austen keeps them almost completely apart, physically. Thus, when Catherine meets the Thorpes in the Pump Room and at the theatre early in her stay at Bath, she looks in vain for Henry Tilney and, by going driving with John Thorpe, misses an opportunity of meeting the Tilneys in the Pump Room. As Catherine becomes increasingly involved with both parties so the conflict becomes more explicit and she is twice placed in situations where she must

choose between them. On each occasion John and Isabella Thorpe act selfishly and make unscrupulous attempts to coerce Catherine into breaking an engagement which, because of its priority, it is only proper that she keep. The most important stages in the rather complicated and sometimes confusing series of developments that finally leave Catherine decisively entrenched within the Tilney camp can be charted around the five ball scenes. At the first, Catherine finds herself completely excluded from social involvement by her chaperone's lack of acquaintances; at the second, she meets Henry Tilney; at the third, she realises the full extent of Tilney's superiority over John Thorpe but is forced to refuse the former in favour of the latter; at the fourth, she is engaged to dance by Tilney at Thorpe's expense; and at the fifth, Thorpe is absent and Tilney is able to enjoy her company unchallenged. Once Catherine is sure of the object of her affection, she is removed by Jane Austen to Northanger Abbey in order that she might become completely worthy of Henry Tilney by learning the full complexity of the world around her and the limitations of her universally benevolent response to experience.

Since the oblique manner in which the opening section is narrated leaves the reader with a very distorted impression of Catherine's childhood, Jane Austen must be held at least partially responsible for the tendency of critics like Mudrick to exaggerate her naïveté and ignorance. By emphasising her limitations as a Gothic heroine the narrator manages to

present a most unpromising initial picture of Catherine:

She had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features;--so much for her person; --and not less unpropitious for heroism seemed her mind. She was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush. Indeed she had no taste for a garden; and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief--at least so it was conjectured from her always preferring those which she was forbidden to take.--Such were her propensities--her abilities were quite as extraordinary. She never could learn or understand any thing before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid. . . . Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine was sure she should like it, for she was very fond of tinkling the keys of the old forlorn spinnet; so, at eight years old she began. She learnt a year, and could not bear it;--and Mrs. Morland, who did not insist on her daughters being accomplished in spite of incapacity or distaste, allowed her to leave off. . . . Her taste for drawing was not superior. . . .--Writing and accounts she was taught by her father; French by her mother: her proficiency in either was not remarkable, and she shirked her lessons in both whenever she could. (13-14)

Some of these adverse comments are, of course, very obviously directed at the creed of sensibility rather than at Catherine, and the reader is consequently not tempted to believe that she is seriously to be blamed for lacking the innate qualities required to learn something before it has been taught to her. Unfortunately, however, Jane Austen seems to have been over-anxious to make her point and, by presenting such a full picture of Catherine at the characteristically unremarkable and unaccomplished age of ten, instead of ignoring her childhood as she does with those of all her other heroines except for Fanny Price, she succeeds in conveying the impression that her heroine is mediocre, not only according to the standards of the Gothic novel, but also according to her own standards.

Jane Austen's irony against the Gothic sensibility continues to be restricting throughout the opening section of Northanger Abbey and only a very vague impression of the positive aspects of Catherine's character emerges. Apart from proving exhaustively that she is not moulded in the Gothic style, the best, it seems, that Jane Austen can say for Catherine is that she grew to enjoy reading and to appreciate the way in which others played the piano. Since Jane Austen believed that the performance of a young person entering the adult world is influenced greatly by his education, Catherine's chances of making a successful transition would seem, from the evidence presented at the beginning of the novel, to be small. Yet, in spite of all of her ingenuous mistakes, Catherine displays a keen awareness of the demands of correct conduct and a certain amount of ability to judge character throughout her visit to Bath. This apparent inconsistency can be resolved by taking note of hints given later in the novel that, even if "her mind [is] about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is" (18), she is by no means totally lacking in refinement or education. Although reducing them to commonplace-books of quotations suitable for heroines, the narrator does admit, even in her original account of Catherine's education, that she has read Pope, Gray, Thompson and Shakespeare. Since it emerges later that Catherine had not read any Gothic novels before becoming acquainted with Isabella Thorpe, and since her mind is naturally rather prosaic, it is unlikely that she

treated the works of these authors in the manner suggested by the narrator, but, rather, that she genuinely enjoyed them as much as she did another of her childhood books, Sir Charles Grandison, which, as she admits to Isabella, she found "very entertaining" (42). Sir Charles Grandison was, of course, one of Jane Austen's own favourite books.

More directly indicative of the sound moral basis of Catherine's education is the accurate appraisal that she is able to make of John Thorpe's faults by contrasting his behaviour with what was normal in her own household:

Catherine listened with astonishment; she knew not how to reconcile two such very different accounts of the same thing; for she had not been brought up to understand the propensities of a rattle, nor to know to how many idle assertions and impudent falsehoods the excess of vanity will lead. Her own family were plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind; her father, at the utmost, being contented with a pun, and her mother with a proverb; they were not in the habit therefore of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next. (65-66)

This positive aspect of her parents' characters, suggested only briefly in the early part of the novel when the narrator notes that their lack of unnecessary anxiety at Catherine's departure makes them unsuitable for playing a role in the life of a Gothic heroine, becomes very apparent after their daughter's return from Northanger Abbey. They are acutely aware of the impropriety involved in General Tilney's conduct, but refuse to engage in vague speculation concerning its cause; they are alert to Catherine's grief, but do not pander to it with exaggerated expressions of sympathy, especially since, to them, the Tilneys seem to be morally

worthless; and they do not allow their awareness of James Morland's disappointment at losing Isabella to blind them to the fact that he has probably made a very lucky escape.

Thus, while Catherine Morland is probably the least accomplished and intelligent of Jane Austen's heroines, she is by no means either uneducated or morally naïve when she is sent out into the world. Her reading has clearly been well directed and she has always been set a good moral example by her parents. A tendency to respond to everyone around her with an uncritical benevolence, the only real fault that emerges during her visit to Bath, derives entirely from her lack of experience. Unlike Jane Austen's other heroines, all of whom, with the exception of Anne Elliot, suffer from serious personal deficiencies, Catherine Morland has little need for self correction, but, rather, has to learn to establish a gap between the self and the world around. Instead of embracing the whole world she finally learns to accept only the best of it and thus rejects the Thorpes in favour of the Tilneys. Only by doing this does Catherine acquire the powers of discrimination required to serve properly the needs of others and thus to be considered a gentlewoman in the fullest sense of the word.

Since Catherine's task is the relatively straightforward one of achieving an understanding of the moral complexity of the world that lies beyond Fullerton parsonage, her own limitations prove to be much less of a handicap than those of Mrs. Allen, her chaperone, who fails to give her any

guidance in the ways of Bath society. As Gallon points out, Mrs. Allen is one of the characters whose function is far from exhausted by her position within the novel's Gothic framework.⁴ Although, in a literal sense, the reverse of the "evil aunt" type with whom the narrator equates her, Mrs. Allen is, morally, almost as dangerous to Catherine as Madame Montoni is to Emily. Her limitations are quickly summed up:

She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner. The air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind, were all that could account for her being the choice of a sensible, intelligent man, like Mr. Allen. In one respect she was admirably fitted to introduce a young lady into public, being as fond of going every where and seeing every thing herself as any young lady could be. Dress was her passion. (20)

Mrs. Allen's inability to serve Catherine's social needs is revealed very decisively during their first visit to the Bath Assembly. After delaying Catherine's entry into society for three or four days because of her own selfish concern with learning the latest fashions, Mrs. Allen fails to win her any social recognition. Knowing no-one, the best that she can offer is the complacently reiterated plea, "I wish you could dance my dear,--I wish you could get a partner" (21). Instead of being placed within the comfort of a social circle, Catherine is forced to push her way through alien crowds. She finds the ball crowded and uncomfortable because she is not part of this world and it can, therefore, find no room for her. Catherine's feelings of exclusion are summed up during the tea interval when the two ladies are compelled to sit at the end of a table which is already occupied by a

large party:

"How uncomfortable it is," whispered Catherine, "not to have a single acquaintance here!"

"Yes, my dear," replied Mrs. Allen, with perfect serenity, "it is very uncomfortable indeed."

"What shall we do?--The gentlemen and ladies at this table look as if they wondered why we came here--we seem forcing ourselves into their party."

"Aye, so we do.--That is very disagreeable. I wish we had a large acquaintance here."

"I wish we had any;--it would be somebody to go to."

"Very true, my dear; and if we knew anybody we would join them directly. The Skinners were here last year--I wish they were here now."

"Had not we better go away as it is?--Here are no tea things for us, you see." (22)

The attention that Catherine draws to herself as the crowds begin to disperse indicates that once she is given an opportunity to operate socially, she will not be lacking in at least the surface charms needed to make use of it:

Every five minutes, by removing some of the crowd, gave greater openings for her charms. She was now seen by many young men who had not been near her before. Not one, however, started with rapturous wonder on beholding her, no whisper of eager inquiry ran round the room, nor was she once called a divinity by any body. Yet Catherine was in very good looks, and had the company only seen her three years before, they would now have thought her exceedingly handsome.

She was looked at however, and with some admiration; for, in her own hearing, two gentlemen pronounced her to be a pretty girl. (23-24)

As this scene shows very concretely, it is not sufficient that Catherine simply be removed from the sanctuary of the family to the world outside; she must also move from the edge of the social honeycomb into one of its many cells.

Catherine soon begins to make this movement, and in so doing finds herself locked in a conflict that she is unable to resolve fully until near the end of the novel. Like Fanny Price, she discovers that social involvement not only

makes life potentially more satisfying but also more complex and dangerous. The two social groups of which Catherine becomes a part are diametrically opposed in almost every way. While Henry and Eleanor Tilney are, in the fullest sense of the word, gentlefolk, being impeccable in their own behaviour and acutely conscious of their duty to others, Isabella and John Thorpe are completely egocentric and selfish. Catherine's moral sense is sufficiently well developed for her to be able to comprehend the worth of the Tilneys and to recognise the manifest faults of John Thorpe almost from the beginning of her acquaintance with them, but she learns only gradually to make the subtle discriminations required to unmask the externally charming Isabella Thorpe. As in all of Jane Austen's novels the formal social occasion serves as the moral testing ground both for the heroine and for her acquaintances and, by paying attention to the finer points of polite conduct, the reader is able to arrive at a firm assessment of all the characters long before Catherine is able to do so.

Catherine's entry into Bath society begins effectively when the master of ceremonies introduces her to Henry Tilney during her first visit to the Lower Rooms. Although there is little immediate indication of the relationship that is to develop between them, their first meeting is a promising one because Catherine is attracted by Tilney's pleasing appearance and manners, and because he is impressed by her ability to understand the satirical basis of his comments about the demands of etiquette. So accomplished is Henry Tilney in the

intricacies of human intercourse that he is able to be critical of the polite social code to which he basically adheres. During his conversation with Catherine, Tilney mocks lightly at the kind of trivial talk in which they are expected to engage:

"I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent--but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars? If you are I will begin directly." (25)

Despite his ironic tone, Tilney nevertheless manages to ask Catherine all the usual questions and, in setting her at her ease, achieves the end at which polite conversation should properly aim. When faced with the older and, as he soon realises, rather foolish, Mrs. Allen, Henry Tilney quickly makes appropriate changes in his stance and reveals a mastery of a more conventional form of intercourse. Although he cannot resist the temptation to introduce an element of mimicry into the earnest conversation about the cost and quality of muslin in which Mrs. Allen engages him, Tilney controls it so finely that, while the amused and slightly shocked Catherine understands him, he gives no offence to the butt of his humour:

Mrs. Allen was quite struck by his genius. "Men commonly take so little notice of those things," said she: "I can never get Mr. Allen to know one of my gowns from another. You must be a great comfort to your sister, sir."

"I hope I am, madam."

"And pray, sir, what do you think of Miss Morland's gown?"

"It is very pretty, madam," said he, gravely examining it; "but I do not think it will wash well; I am afraid it will fray."

"How can you," said Catherine, laughing, "be so--" she had almost said, strange. (28)

By the manner in which he behaves during both of these conversations Henry Tilney shows that, while he is not prepared to subordinate his own personality to the demands of social intercourse, he is acutely concerned to avoid exerting the self at the expense of others.

Catherine's ability to retain her poise in the face of Henry Tilney's somewhat unorthodox approach and to understand the satiric basis of his conversation with her chaperone reveals that she is by no means either unintelligent or imperceptive. Moreover, even at this early stage in their relationship there are signs that Henry Tilney understands Catherine's abilities and is eager to help give shape to her personality. Thus, before Mrs. Allen's interruption, his conversation with Catherine begins to take on a more serious tone as a result of her refusal to accept some of his more exaggerated ironic generalisations:

"Every body allows that the talent of writing agreeable letters is peculiarly female. Nature may have done something, but I am sure it must be essentially assisted by the practice of keeping a journal."

"I have sometimes thought," said Catherine, doubtfully, "whether ladies do write so much better letters than gentlemen! That is--I should not think the superiority was always on our side."

"As far as I have had opportunity of judging, it appears to me that the usual style of letter-writing among women is faultless, except in three particulars."

"And what are they?"

"A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar."

"Upon my word! I need not have been afraid of disclaiming the compliment. You do not think too highly of us in that way."

"I should no more lay it down as a general rule that women write better letters than men, than that they sing better duets, or draw better landscapes. In every power, of which taste is

the foundation, excellence is pretty fairly divided between the sexes." (27-28)

The second element in the novel's extremely patterned conflict is introduced when, instead of meeting Henry Tilney during her next visit to the Pump Room, as she had hoped to do, Catherine makes the acquaintance of Mrs. Thorpe and her daughter, Isabella. As is the case throughout Catherine's relationship with the Tilneys and the Thorpes, Jane Austen stresses the moral exclusiveness of the two groups on this occasion by manipulating her action so that the presence of the one seems almost to guarantee the absence of the other. So excited is Catherine at the prospect of any increase in the number of her acquaintances and so trusting is she of the respectability of anyone that her chaperone, Mrs. Allen, might deem worthy of introduction, that she is readily impressed by Isabella's external charm and poise. Yet, as the narrator emphasises, Isabella Thorpe is basically a self-seeking and trivial young woman who promises to do little to help Catherine achieve maturity:

Their conversation turned upon those subjects, of which the free discussion has generally much to do in perfecting a sudden intimacy between two young ladies; such as dress, balls, flirtations, and quizzes. Miss Thorpe, however, being four years older than Miss Morland, and at least four years better informed, had a very decided advantage in discussing such points. . . . These powers received due admiration from Catherine, to whom they were entirely new; and the respect which they naturally inspired might have been too great for familiarity, had not the easy gaiety of Miss Thorpe's manners, and her frequent expressions of delight on this acquaintance with her, softened down every feeling of awe, and left nothing but tender affection. (33-34)

It thus becomes clear that, although Catherine is sensitive enough to become an object of interest to Henry Tilney she

does not, as yet, possess the moral subtlety required to discriminate between his real wit and charm, and Isabella's skilful facsimile of these qualities.

The Thorpe influence reigns unchecked over Catherine for some time after this first meeting, and it requires only further encounters at the theatre and in the Pump Room for her immediate intimacy with Isabella to be cemented into an undying friendship. Henry Tilney's absence is emphasised on each occasion:

Catherine was not so much engaged at the theatre that evening, in returning the nods and smiles of Miss Thorpe, though they certainly claimed much of her leisure, as to forget to look with an inquiring eye for Mr. Tilney in every box which her eye could reach; but she looked in vain. (35)

As soon as divine service was over, the Thorpes and Allens eagerly joined each other; and after staying long enough in the Pump-room to discover that the crowd was insupportable . . . , they hastened away to the Crescent, to breathe the fresh air of better company. Here Catherine and Isabella, arm in arm, again tasted the sweets of friendship in an unreserved conversation;--they talked much, and with much enjoyment; but again was Catherine disappointed in her hope of re-seeing her partner. (35)

Although this stress on Tilney's absence introduces the disturbing hint that, in pursuing her friendship with Isabella, Catherine is potentially straying outside of the moral pale, it is not until they meet in the Pump Room eight or nine days later that Isabella begins to reveal something of her real turpitude. The exact nature of Isabella's moral limitations is first suggested by the manner in which she expatiates upon her own loyalty to Miss Andrews and, potentially, to Catherine:

"There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is

not my nature. My attachments are always excessively strong. I told Capt. Hunt at one of our assemblies this winter, that if he was to tease me all night, I would not dance with him, unless he would allow Miss Andrews to be as beautiful as an angel. The men think us incapable of real friendship you know, and I am determined to show them the difference. Now if I were to hear any body speak slightly of you, I should fire up in a moment." (40-41)

Even if Isabella's protestations were genuine, and her subsequent ready confession that Miss Andrews is "amazingly insipid" (41) shows that they are not, the self-congratulatory tone with which she expounds her own worth would be sufficient to suggest that she regards virtuous conduct as a means of emphasising the importance of the self rather than of truly being servicable to others. A similar gap between external appearance and inner motives characterises Isabella's conduct on all occasions. For her the creed of sensibility, to which she supposedly adheres, serves only as a means of masking selfishly individualistic and aggressively economic motives. It would perhaps be harsh to condemn Catherine for lacking the subtle powers of discrimination required to comprehend the selfish basis of Isabella's apparently altruistic comments, especially as they embody an avowal of friendship towards herself. However, at first sight, there seems to be less excuse for her inability to pierce the thin veneer of modesty with which Isabella conceals the rather gross and extremely improper attempt at flirtation in which she next indulges. Indeed, Catherine is made to appear rather ridiculous and truly naïve by her failure to perceive the purely rhetorical nature of Isabella's expressions of alarm at the prospect of being approached by the two young men towards

whom her attentions are directed. Yet, it is important to realise that, as in her failure to recognise the egocentric basis of Isabella's claims to loyalty, Catherine is not guilty of any inherent lack of moral faculties, but is simply unable to understand that apparent and real motives cannot always be equated. Because of her lack of experience, Catherine is compelled to judge everyone according to her own standards and, therefore, cannot perceive how anyone who is aware of the demands of correct conduct can possibly behave improperly. Thus, Catherine is satisfied that there is nothing indecorous in her friend's extremely confusing reaction to the two young men simply because Isabella frequently asserts that she is acting in a proper manner.

The way in which Catherine responds to Isabella's brother, John, firmly establishes that she is by no means totally ingenuous. As the friend of her own brother, as the brother of her friend and, most important of all, as a young man of reasonable physical charms who shows an obvious interest in herself, John Thorpe has such strong claims on Catherine's good will that, when asked her opinion of him at the end of their first meeting, she says "I like him very much; he seems very agreeable" (50). However, when she applies more objective standards and judges him entirely on his merits, Catherine admits to herself that she finds Thorpe thoroughly unpleasant. Although, in fact, no more selfish and immoral than his sister, Thorpe lacks her surface charms and is unable, therefore, to conceal his real

self from anyone who is aware of the moral implications of manners. His conduct when introduced to Isabella and Catherine fails completely to meet the needs of the immediate situation because he is negligent of his sister and far too extravagant in his greeting of Catherine, with whom he was previously unacquainted:

John Thorpe, who in the mean time had been giving orders about the horses, soon joined them, and from him she directly received the amends which were her due; for while he slightly and carelessly touched the hand of Isabella, on her he bestowed a whole scrape and half a short bow. (45)

Thorpe's ignorance of the manner in which he should behave towards a young woman whom he scarcely knows is revealed even more clearly when he tries to engage Catherine in a tête-a-tête carriage ride only minutes after their initial introduction. In addition to these lapses, Thorpe lies rather pathetically about the prowess of his horses, allows himself the liberty of commenting on every young woman they pass, reveals a complete ignorance of all types of literature, and is extremely impertinent to his mother. Although Catherine is not required to call upon particularly subtle powers of discrimination in order to separate the John Thorpe whose worth she is able to gauge for herself from the John Thorpe who, according to all external considerations, has a large claim on her affections, her response at least reveals that she is able, on occasion, to make objective judgements and that she has enough understanding of the importance of good manners to make these judgements meaningful. Catherine Morland is too inexperienced in the ways of the adult world

to penetrate Isabella Thorpe's hypocritical façade, but she has acquired sufficient moral grounding from her parents to make an accurate appraisal of the transparently boorish John Thorpe.

Having introduced in turn each of the major characters with the exception of Eleanor Tilney, and having stressed the moral exclusiveness of the two groups to which Catherine is attached by keeping them physically apart, Jane Austen finally brings her protagonists together at the next ball. By the end of the evening Catherine is even more sure that Henry Tilney is superior to John Thorpe, but is still unaware of Isabella's faults despite her selfish conduct and the obviously finer qualities revealed by Eleanor Tilney. Because of this continued inability to make absolute moral discriminations between the Tilneys and the Thorpes, Catherine moves uneasily between the two parties throughout the evening before finding herself at last completely and unwillingly separated from the Tilneys. The point made by the physical manoeuvrings around which the scene is constructed is that Catherine cannot hope to become a part of Henry Tilney's world until she learns to reject the Thorpes completely. Since the problem facing Catherine is at once as narrow as a choice between different individuals, and as broad as a choice between two contrasting life styles, it is important not to underrate the implications of such apparently trivial incidents as her unwilling rejection of Henry Tilney's offer to dance in favour of her prior engagement to John Thorpe.

Although Jane Austen does little more than reiterate and confirm what she has already established about the moral worth of the four main agents in Catherine's fate and about the quality of her heroine's response to the world around her, these points gain considerable weight as a result of the direct juxtapositions possible within the confined scope of the ballroom situation. The full extent of Isabella Thorpe's worthlessness can thus be gauged more accurately when she is explicitly compared to Eleanor Tilney:

Miss Tilney had a good figure, a pretty face, and a very agreeable countenance; and her air, though it had not all the decided pretension, the resolute stilishness of Miss Thorpe's, had more real elegance. Her manners shewed good sense and good breeding; they were neither shy, nor affectedly open; and she seemed capable of being young, attractive, and at a ball, without wanting to fix the attention of every man near her, and without exaggerated feelings of extatic delight or inconceivable vexation on every little trifling occurrence. (55-56)

Similarly, John Thorpe's lack of good manners and concern for others are made to appear even more gross when his response to Catherine is contrasted with Henry Tilney's. Thorpe is extremely tardy in fulfilling his obligation to dance with Catherine, makes little attempt at apology when he finally makes his appearance, and then engages her in a tedious conversation about horses and dogs during the dance. Henry Tilney, on the other hand, approaches Catherine respectfully, talks politely about matters of mutual interest and, thinking that she is unengaged, graciously asks her to dance.

Although compelled by her prior engagement to refuse Tilney in favour of Thorpe, Catherine has little doubt about which of the two men she prefers:

This was accordingly done, Mr. Tilney still continuing standing before them; and after a few minutes consideration, he asked Catherine to dance with him. This compliment, delightful as it was, produced severe mortification to the lady; and in giving her denial, she expressed her sorrow on the occasion so very much as if she really felt it, that had Thorpe, who joined her just afterwards, been half a minute earlier, he might have thought her sufferings rather too acute. (54-55)

Unfortunately, Catherine is incapable of making such an accurate appraisal of the relative worth of Isabella Thorpe and Eleanor Tilney. While she is sensitive enough to appreciate Eleanor's attractive manners, Catherine continues to be over-benevolent in her response to Isabella. Yet, Isabella's selfishness and the hollowness of her pledges of friendship are clearly exposed by her conduct at the beginning of the ball. Having assured Catherine that she will not stand up until her partner returns, Isabella quickly becomes impatient at this frustration of her own satisfaction and, deserting her friend, hastens James Morland into the dance. Although Isabella's behaviour is even more obviously improper on this occasion than it was in the Pump Room, Catherine's good nature once again prevents her from taking offence.

While neither Jane Austen nor, later, Henry Tilney condemn Catherine for her excessive benevolence, it does serve to limit her social potentialities. Until she learns to be more critical of others, Catherine will inevitably be exposed not only to the bad moral influence of the plausible Isabella, but also to the unwelcome attentions of John Thorpe. Indeed, by taking advantage of the frequent opportunities for intercourse granted to him by his special position as the

brother of her friend, John Thorpe, as on this occasion, often proves to be an even more effective hindrance to Catherine's friendship with the Tilneys than Isabella.

The events of this ball serve to hint rather forebodingly at the fate that awaits Catherine unless she can cast off the Thorpe influence. Although she becomes increasingly bored with the silly behaviour of Isabella and annoyed by the rudeness of John Thorpe, Catherine finds that, simply by engrossing her attention, the Thorpes are able to preclude any intercourse with the Tilneys. As the relative physical positions of the characters during the tea interval suggest, Catherine is in some danger of falling into a moral limbo in which she will be excluded from the Tilney world but will be unwilling to become involved in many of the Thorpes' activities.

The rest of the evening she found very dull; Mr. Tilney was drawn away from their party at tea, to attend that of his partner; Miss Tilney, though belonging to it, did not sit near her, and James and Isabella were so much engaged in conversing together, that the latter had no leisure to bestow more on her friend than one smile, one squeeze, and one "dearest Catherine." (59)

Despite this stress on the darker implications of her friendship with John and Isabella Thorpe, and despite her temporary separation from the Tilneys, Catherine's relationship with Henry Tilney does not, in fact, suffer as a result of the evening's activities. As a man acutely aware of the importance of good manners, Tilney cannot help but realise that, in refusing his offer to dance, Catherine is not showing a personal preference for John Thorpe but is simply

honouring a previous engagement. By acting in this manner Catherine reveals an ability to deny her own immediate wishes and a sense of obligation to others. Thus, although as an immediate result of her unselfish behaviour Catherine loses Henry Tilney's company, in the long view, it is by such conduct that she wins his love and esteem.

Lest it be thought that too much is being made of the moral implications of polite behaviour, it might be as well to point out that in Fanny Burney's Evelina, the pure, but almost completely naïve, heroine is held in low esteem by Lord Orville for much of the novel because she makes the mistake of accepting his offer to dance after turning down another partner. Their relationship flourishes only after he learns of the unintentional nature of her impropriety. Evelina, herself, soon realises the seriousness of her social faux pas:

A confused idea now for the first time entered my head, of something I had heard of the rules of assemblies; but I was never at one before,--I have only danced at school,--and so giddy and heedless I was, that I had not once considered the impropriety of refusing one partner, and afterwards accepting another. I was thunderstruck at the recollection.⁵

Although Catherine comes no nearer to making an accurate moral evaluation of Isabella Thorpe in the days following the ball, she is able to confirm both her dislike of John Thorpe and her high estimation of Henry and Eleanor Tilney. This important, if not crucial, development in Catherine's response to the world around her is epitomised by the way in which, at the next ball, Henry Tilney succeeds in usurping what John Thorpe assumes to be his rightful position as her

partner. While Catherine is still unaware of the full moral implications of her relationship with the Thorpes and the Tilneys, Jane Austen repeatedly reminds the reader of them by continuing to keep the two groups very strictly apart.

Catherine's poor opinion of John Thorpe is fully confirmed by his behaviour on the day after the ball. Although she finds his assumption that she is engaged to ride with him embarrassing, Catherine is intrigued by the prospect of an outing and turns to Mrs. Allen for advice. It is, of course, the chaperone's duty to provide the young girl entering the adult world with firm moral guidance in any situation where she is unable to reconcile her own wishes to the demands of propriety. Unfortunately, Mrs. Allen once again fails to fulfill her function and placidly agrees to the plan. Catherine's punishment for allowing a temporary whim to overcome her better judgement is severe because Thorpe's boasting proves to be more tedious than ever and his lies more confusing. Once again Catherine is forced to admit that she does not like Thorpe despite his claims on her friendship:

Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt, while she bore with the effusions of his endless conceit, of his being altogether completely agreeable. It was a bold surmise, for he was Isabella's brother; and she had been assured by James, that his manners would recommend him to all her sex; but in spite of this, the extreme weariness of his company, which crept over her before they had been out an hour, and which continued unceasingly to increase till they stopped in Pulteney-street again, induced her, in some small degree, to resist such high authority, and to distrust his powers of giving universal pleasure. (66-67)

On her return home Catherine is chagrined to discover that had she accompanied Mrs. Allen on her morning walk, instead of going riding with John Thorpe, she would have met the Tilneys. Jane Austen thus suggests, even more strongly than before, that the Thorpes and Tilneys are mutually exclusive. By yielding to the claims of the one group Catherine is inevitably forced, not only morally, but also, it seems, physically, to deny the other. This moral gap is emphasised by yet another physical separation on the occasion of Catherine's next visit to the theatre. Arriving in company with the Allens and the Thorpes, Catherine is disappointed to find that Henry Tilney is again absent.

However, Catherine is soon able to renew her acquaintance with Eleanor Tilney. Although she attends the Pump Room with the Thorpe party, the pattern of separation is not broken because Catherine, bored with the trivial and almost completely private conversation in which Isabella and James are engaged, breaks away from them totally in order to join Eleanor:

They [Isabella and James] were always engaged in some sentimental discussion or lively dispute, but their sentiment was conveyed in such whispering voices, and their vivacity attended with so much laughter, that though Catherine's supporting opinion was not unfrequently called for by one or the other, she was never able to give any, from not having heard a word of the subject. At length however she was empowered to disengage herself from her friend, by the avowed necessity of speaking to Miss Tilney, whom she most joyfully saw just entering the room with Mrs. Hughes, and whom she instantly joined, with a firmer determination to be acquainted, than she might have had courage to command, had she not been urged by the disappointment of the day before. (72)

The modest and unpretentious nature of the polite comments

that pass between the two young women contrasts sharply with what Catherine has been used to in the company of Isabella Thorpe:

Miss Tilney met her with great civility, returned her advances with equal good will, and they continued talking together as long as both parties remained in the room; and though in all probability not an observation was made, nor an expression used by either which had not been made and used some thousands of times before, under that roof, in every Bath season, yet the merit of their being spoken with simplicity and truth, and without personal conceit, might be something uncommon. (72)

As she shows by her decisive rejection of John Thorpe and by her movement away from Isabella to Eleanor, Catherine is gradually beginning to realise, if still half-unconsciously, that both morally and emotionally, her sympathies lie with the Tilneys rather than with the Thorpes.

This stage in Catherine's development is epitomised in one brilliantly succinct and concrete episode during the next ball. Free this time from any prior engagement, Catherine is forced to wait anxiously for a partner. For a while it seems that John Thorpe will come forward and claim her hand, but Tilney suddenly makes an appearance and asks her for the next dance. The anguished nature of Catherine's brief vigil suggests that she realises that it is by such polite jousts that the pattern, not only of the evening, but also of her whole life, will be decided:

John Thorpe was still in view, and she gave herself up for lost. That she might not appear, however, to observe or expect him, she kept her eyes intently fixed on her fan; and a self-condemnation for her folly, in supposing that among such a crowd they should even meet with the Tilneys in any reasonable time, had just passed through her mind, when she suddenly found herself addressed and again solicited to dance, by Mr. Tilney himself. With what sparkling eyes and ready motion she granted his request, and with how pleasing a

flutter of heart she went with him to the set, may be easily imagined. To escape, and, as she believed, so narrowly escape John Thorpe, and to be asked, so immediately on his joining her, asked by Mr. Tilney, as if he had sought her on purpose! --it did not appear to her that life could supply any greater felicity. (75)

Although Thorpe protests indignantly at this "cursed shabby trick" (75) there is nothing he can do to alter either Catherine's immediate or her permanent statement of preference for Henry Tilney. Just as Thorpe is "born off by the resistless pressure of a long string of passing ladies" (76), thus leaving his rival free to come forward and lead Catherine into the dance, so is he swept permanently out of her affections.

The larger implications of this brief struggle to engage Catherine are made quite explicit by Henry Tilney who, in his usual mock-serious manner, comments,

"That gentleman would have put me out of patience, had he staid with you half a minute longer. He has no business to withdraw the attention of my partner from me. We have entered into a contract of mutual agreeableness for the space of an evening, and all our agreeableness belongs solely to each other for that time. Nobody can fasten themselves on the notice of one, without injuring the rights of the other. I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage. Fidelity and complaisance are the principal duties of both; and those men who do not chuse to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the partners or wives of their neighbours." (76)

The analogy made here between the dance and marriage is implicit in the structure of all of Jane Austen's novels, since the heroine's relationship with her future husband is not only developed largely within the context of the ballroom situation, but also follows the general pattern of pairing and parting around which the country dance is organised. Thus, in Northanger Abbey, Catherine meets Henry Tilney at

her second ball, is parted from him at the third, is reunited at the fourth, and is indisputably his partner at the fifth.

Besides summing up the preceding action, this scene serves to mark a significant stage in the development of the relationship between the two lovers because Henry Tilney's initial good impression of Catherine is confirmed by the manner in which she conducts herself while they dance. She responds to his polite banter about the relationship between the dance and marriage sensibly and accepts his compliments modestly. When the subject of conversation changes to the relative merits of the country and Bath, Tilney is less shocked by the "intellectual poverty" (79) of Catherine's home life, which can after all be rectified, than impressed by the affection that she feels for her family:

"If I could but have papa and mamma, and the rest of them here, I suppose I should be too happy! James's coming (my eldest brother) is quite delightful--and especially as it turns out, that the very family we are just got so intimate with, are his intimate friends already. Oh! who can ever be tired of Bath?"

"Not those who bring such fresh feelings of every sort to it, as you do. But papas and mammas, and brothers and intimate friends are a good deal gone by, to most of the frequenters of Bath--and the honest relish of balls and plays, and every-day sights, is past with them." (79)

These developments in Catherine's attitude to the forces vying for her allegiance indicate that it will be only a matter of time before she is able to comprehend fully the moral basis of her rapidly increasing preference for the Tilneys. Unfortunately, however, as the next day's events demonstrate, Catherine's relationship with Henry and Eleanor will not be allowed to progress smoothly until the propitious

separation from Isabella, which she is fortunate enough to experience during the ball, becomes permanent. Having arranged to go walking with the Tilneys, Catherine is suddenly faced with the Thorpes' alternative invitation to visit Blaize Castle. In normal circumstances there could be little doubt about her decision because, as with the dance, the first invitation must always take priority. However, on this occasion, Catherine is coerced into disobeying the rules of correct conduct because the Gothic fantasies aroused in her by Isabella make her so eager to explore "an edifice like Udolpho" (87) that she accepts without suspicion John Thorpe's unlikely claim that he saw the Tilneys driving out of town. Mrs. Allen once again fails to provide her ward with firm moral guidance and readily encourages the still hesitant Catherine to break her original engagement. The double threat posed by the Thorpes is epitomised in this incident. So long as she allows Isabella to influence any part of her approach to experience, and so long as she exposes herself, through friendship with his sister, to the attentions of John Thorpe, Catherine will repeatedly be forced to disobey the demands of propriety.

Since the Tilneys had not, as John Thorpe claims, broken their part of the engagement, Catherine's, albeit unintentional, rudeness could have led to an extended misunderstanding similar to that which hampers Evelina's relationship with Lord Orville. However, Catherine, for all her immaturity, is not a complete ingénue like Evelina, and she

realises that she must immediately explain her mistake to the Tilneys and beg their forgiveness. Because it hinders harmonious social intercourse, ingenuousness like Evelina's is not, as far as Jane Austen is concerned, a mark of virtue.

Catherine's first attempt at making her apologies is frustrated when she is turned away from the Tilneys' door even though Eleanor is at home. Although she is extremely offended by this rudeness, Catherine is so conscious of her own misconduct that she checks all feelings of resentment:

Catherine, in deep mortification, proceeded on her way. She could almost be angry herself at such angry incivility; but she checked the resentful sensation; she remembered her own ignorance. She knew not how such an offence as her's might be classed by the laws of worldly politeness, to what a degree of unforgiveness it might with propriety lead, nor to what rigours of rudeness in return it might justly make her amenable. (92)

Henry Tilney's coldly formal behaviour at the theatre is scarcely less daunting, but Catherine is again far too conscious of the justice of his resentment to take offence, and carries out her original intention of making an explanation and an apology:

Feelings rather natural than heroic possessed her; instead of considering her own dignity injured by this ready condemnation--instead of proudly resolving, in conscious innocence, to shew her resentment towards him who could harbour a doubt of it, to leave to him all the trouble of seeking an explanation, and to enlighten him on the past only by avoiding his sight, or flirting with somebody else, she took to herself all the shame of misconduct, or at least of its appearance, and was only eager for an opportunity of explaining its cause. (93)

Tilney responds warmly to her frankness. Not only does he accept her version of the misunderstanding but he is also able to explain that his sister's apparent rudeness was caused

by General Tilney's unwillingness to delay going out. The General's selfishness here, and later, helps to make Henry Tilney sympathetic towards the problems caused Catherine by the Thorpes.

The incident, which began so unpropitiously, is thus terminated in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. While Catherine's selfless and unsuspectingly benevolent response to experience can be dangerous when she is dealing with so unprincipled a person as Isabella Thorpe, it cannot help but serve, as on this occasion, to further her relationship with the Tilneys. Rather than being lessened, Henry Tilney's good opinion of Catherine is eventually improved by this unfortunate episode, especially as her behaviour contrasts favourably with his own uncharitable response:

Catherine's mind was greatly eased by this information, yet a something of solicitude remained, from which sprang the following question, thoroughly artless in itself, though rather distressing to the gentleman:--"But, Mr. Tilney, why were you less generous than your sister? If she felt such confidence in my good intentions, and could suppose it to be only a mistake, why should you be so ready to take offence?"

"Me!--I take offence!"

"Nay, I am sure by your look, when you came into the box, you were angry."

"I angry! I could have no right."

"Well, nobody would have thought you had no right who saw your face." He replied by asking her to make room for him, and talking of the play. (94-95)

By the simple method of repeating the original situation, Jane Austen demonstrates that, as a result of her experience, Catherine has learnt that the demands of propriety cannot always be reconciled with the advice given by the Thorpes and Mrs. Allen. Once again she is engaged to walk with the Tilneys, and once again the Thorpes propose an

alternative outing. However, despite the opposition of Isabella and John Thorpe, and even of her own brother, Catherine remains firm in her conviction that precedence must be granted to the prior engagement. In rationalising her unpopular stand to herself, Catherine becomes convinced that she is not resisting her friends' wishes out of a desire for self-gratification, as Isabella Thorpe unkindly suggests, but because of an awareness of her obligations to others:

It was painful to her to disappoint and displease them, particularly to displease her brother; but she could not repent her resistance. Setting her own inclination apart, to have failed a second time in her engagement to Miss Tilney, to have retracted a promise voluntarily made only five minutes before, and on a false pretence too, must have been wrong. She had not been withstanding them on selfish principles alone, she had not consulted merely her own gratification; that might have been ensured in some degree by the excursion itself, by seeing Blaize Castle; no, she had attended to what was due to others, and to her own character in their opinion. (101)

Catherine's actions are further justified when Mr. Allen, for once speaking instead of his silly wife, expresses a disapproval of "young ladies [being] frequently driven about . . . by young men, to whom they are not even related" (104). The sense of relief that she feels at escaping so narrowly from such an improper outing demonstrates very clearly that, despite her immaturity and lack of practical acquaintance with the adult world, Catherine is acutely aware of the importance of correct behaviour:

Catherine submitted; and though sorry to think that Isabella should be doing wrong, felt greatly relieved by Mr. Allen's approbation of her own conduct, and truly rejoiced to be preserved by his advice from the danger of falling into such an error herself. Her escape from being one of the party to Clifton was now an escape indeed; for what would the Tilneys have thought of her, if she had broken her promise to them in

order to do what was wrong in itself? if she had been guilty of one breach of propriety, only to enable her to be guilty of another? (105)

Catherine is rewarded for her moral firmness with a walk that is different in every respect from the carriage rides with John Thorpe, since rational conversation and orderly conduct replace boasting and irresponsible haste. In discussing literature and art, Henry Tilney displays a range of knowledge far beyond Catherine's, but is concerned with increasing her awareness rather than with demonstrating his own accomplishments. Catherine responds excellently to the stimulation provided by such intelligent and considerate company, and it is disputable whether Henry Tilney is more impressed by the revelation that she is by no means ignorant of literary forms beyond the Gothic novel, but rather reads "poetry and plays, and things of that sort, and [does] not dislike travels" (108), or by her charming naïveté about the picturesque. The suggestion made throughout this scene that, with the help of the Tilneys, Catherine can hope to achieve moral and intellectual heights beyond the scope of the ordinary man, is crystallised by the tableau in which she is posed alongside her friends on a hill overlooking the city of Bath.

However, such heights are not easily achieved despite the recent improvements in Catherine's powers of moral perception, and the resolution of the novel's conflicts is slow and rather involved. Although John Thorpe is effectively exiled from her moral sphere by his departure for Devizes following the failure of his bungling proposal of marriage,

Catherine has still not learnt to modify her uncritically benevolent response to Isabella. Thus, while nothing occurs during the next ball to hinder her enjoyment of Henry Tilney's company, Catherine reveals that she is still not ready for marriage by failing to censure Isabella for breaking her resolution not to accept any partners in the absence of her fiancé, James. Henry Tilney, who is at once impressed by her good nature and alarmed at the errors into which it can lead her, gently chides Catherine for assuming that everyone acts according to her own high standards:

"How very little trouble it can give you to understand the motive of other people's actions."

"Why?--What do you mean?"

"With you, it is not, How is such a one likely to be influenced? What is the inducement most likely to act upon such a person's feelings, age, situation, and probable habits of life considered?--but, how should I be influenced, what would by my inducement in acting so and so?" (132)

Catherine finally achieves enlightenment only after she has moved from Bath to Northanger Abbey. As in her other novels, Jane Austen employs the visit as a means of broadening the heroine's frame of moral reference, and it is by untangling the mysteries surrounding General Tilney that Catherine acquires the degree of sophistication needed to understand Isabella Thorpe. In many ways, the whole Northanger episode is the weakest part of the novel because Catherine's Gothic fantasies are drawn out to tedious lengths and, even more important, are a denial of the considerable maturity that she has achieved during her stay in Bath. Very suddenly, Catherine degenerates to the level of Arabella, the burlesque heroine of Mrs. Lennox's Female Quixote. Nevertheless, the

visit to Northanger Abbey does complete the novel's thematic development because Catherine's fantasies derive not only from the romantic associations of the name "Northanger Abbey," but also from her failure to understand the source of the General's strange manners. The simple truth that she is too benevolent to bring herself to accept is that General Tilney is thoroughly selfish. From the beginning of their relationship, his manners are not aimed at increasing the ease of those around him but at self-glorification. Thus, breakfast in Pulteney Street is an uneasy business because the unbending formality of his conduct makes it impossible for Catherine to forget that she is a guest. General Tilney's failure to understand that external display, whether it takes the shape of good manners or splendid possessions, is not an end in itself, but is, rather, intended to reveal one's concern with and ability to serve others, is demonstrated even more clearly during the journey to Northanger Abbey. Despite the fastidious correctness of his carriage, horses and outriders, little sense of comfort or harmony prevails during the journey because of the General's domineering and selfish conduct:

The tediousness of a two hours' bait at Petty-France, in which there was nothing to be done but to eat without being hungry, and loiter about without any thing to see, next followed--and her admiration of the style in which they travelled, of the fashionable chaise-and-four--postillions handsomely liveried, rising so regularly in their stirrups, and numerous out-riders properly mounted, sunk a little under this consequent inconvenience. Had their party been perfectly agreeable, the delay would have been nothing; but General Tilney, though so charming a man, seemed always a check upon his children's spirits, and scarcely any thing was said but by himself; the observation of which, with his discontent at whatever the inn afforded, and his angry impatience at the waiters, made Catherine grow every moment more in awe of him, and appeared

to lengthen the two hours into four. (156)

So oppressive does General Tilney's concern with propriety become during Catherine's visit to the Abbey that this sense of awe gradually turns into something close to fear. His politely framed, but basically selfish, insistence that everything be conducted in accordance with his own wishes confuses and troubles Catherine and she is infected by the general sense of tension produced by his rigid insistence on punctuality at meal times. Since, as in her relationship with Isabella, Catherine is still unable to recognise that a superficial concern with propriety does not necessarily reflect any real awareness of the larger significance of good manners, she tries to rationalise her sense of uneasiness by forcing the General's apparently incomprehensible actions into a Gothic framework. The results produced by approaching actual experience in purely literary terms are inevitably ludicrous. Thus, Catherine accepts the General's refusal to hang his wife's picture in his own room, which in fact derives from a fastidious objection to its quality as a painting, as conclusive evidence of the guilty workings of a murderer's conscience.

While the sudden shattering of these Gothic illusions does not bring Catherine to any immediate understanding of either General Tilney or Isabella, it does make her aware that, however unpleasant the conclusions, accurate evaluations can be made only by judging a person's behaviour according to "the laws of the land, and the manners of the age":

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. . . . Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. (200)

Thus, when James Morland writes to explain that his fiancée has rejected him in favour of Captain Tilney, Catherine ceases to be influenced by Isabella's own claims that she is sincere and virtuous, and judges her entirely according to the merits of her actions. In affirming that all feelings of friendship have disappeared, Catherine is also, in effect, asserting that, at last, she has learnt to respond critically to the world around her:

"To say the truth, though I am hurt and grieved, that I cannot still love her, that I am never to hear from her, perhaps never to see her again, I do not feel so very, very much afflicted as one would have thought." (207)

Isabella's attempt at reviving their intimacy serves only to strengthen Catherine's awareness that, despite an outward concern with propriety, not everyone lives up to her own high standards:

Such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine. Its inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood, struck her from the very first. She was ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her. Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent. (218)

Catherine is similarly alert to the implications of her sudden dismissal from Northanger Abbey by General Tilney. Although he makes a token gesture towards propriety by pleading a previous engagement, Catherine is acutely conscious

that, by hastening her departure and by failing to provide for her safety and comfort, the General is guilty of the grossest possible misconduct:

It was as incomprehensible as it was mortifying and grievous. From what it could arise, and where it would end, were considerations of equal perplexity and alarm. The manner in which it was done so grossly uncivil; hurrying her away without any reference to her own convenience, or allowing her even the appearance of choice as to the time or mode of her travelling; of two days, the earliest fixed on, and of that almost the earliest hour, as if resolved to have her gone before he was stirring in the morning, that he might not be obliged even to see her. What could all this mean but an intentional affront? By some means or other she must have had the misfortune to offend him. Eleanor had wished to spare her from so painful a notion, but Catherine could not believe it possible that any injury or any misfortune could provoke such ill-will against a person not connected, or, at least, not supposed to be connected with it. (226-227)

Henry Tilney's explanation of the full sordidness of his father's motivations comes as no surprise to a Catherine who is now more aware than ever that she cannot anticipate that people will always act according to the standards that she sets for herself, and she makes no attempt to excuse either John Thorpe, who misled the General into believing her to be richer than she actually is, or General Tilney, who was too snobbish to accept her once he discovered that Thorpe was lying.

Having finally achieved a mature response to the world around her, Catherine is now ready to take her place in adult society. It is thus appropriate that, at this point, Henry Tilney should propose marriage. Since they have transcended the limitations of both of their families and of the Bath world, it is fitting that Catherine and Henry should move away and establish themselves in the parsonage at Woodston.

An earlier visit to Woodston has already convinced Catherine that it is here that her best chances of happiness lie.

Unlike General Tilney, who quibbles about faulty details, Catherine can see only perfection in the village and the parsonage:

Catherine was ashamed to say how pretty she thought it, as the General seemed to think an apology necessary for the flatness of the country, and the size of the village; but in her heart she preferred it to any place she had ever been at, and looked with great admiration at every neat house above the rank of a cottage, and at all the little chandler's shops which they passed. At the further end of the village, and tolerably disengaged from the rest of it, stood the Parsonage, a new-built substantial stone house, with its semi-circular sweep and green gates; and, as they drove up to the door, Henry, with the friends of his solitude, a large Newfoundland puppy and two or three terriers, was ready to receive and make much of them. (212)

In contrast to Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse, Catherine Morland is both aware of, and eager to conform to, the demands of propriety throughout the period of her transition from childhood to the adult world. Were this world populated entirely by responsible and kind people like the younger Tilneys and obvious rogues like John Thorpe, Catherine would need only to acquire a fuller knowledge of the complex structure of manners in order to achieve maturity. Unfortunately, it also includes such villains as Isabella Thorpe and General Tilney, who conceal their real selfishness beneath a façade of politeness. Until she learns to discriminate between the truly virtuous individual and the plausible hypocrite, Catherine remains a confused child in an alien world, and is unable to properly fulfill her social duties. Catherine's development can perhaps be best summed up by

taking note of the way in which Jane Austen uses the convention of the prior engagement. Throughout the novel Catherine is aware of the serious duties involved in such a convention and proves her worth to the Tilneys by honouring her obligation to dance with John Thorpe in spite of Henry Tilney's alternative offer, and by the sincere way in which she apologises for inadvertently breaking her engagement to go walking with them. She is also able to understand the gravity of the offence implicit in John Thorpe's repeated attempts to make her break engagements with the Tilneys. However, Catherine's response to the world around her remains inadequate until she learns to understand that a person like General Tilney is not necessarily behaving correctly merely because he reveals a theoretical awareness of the demands of propriety by pleading a prior engagement.

Since I have been concerned throughout this chapter with discussing the particular problems facing a particular young woman during the brief period between her first separation from her family and the moment when she enters into matrimony, it is perhaps advisable at this point to recall briefly the archetypal dimensions of Catherine Morland's quest for maturity. By leaving the safety of the home environment, by exposing herself to a series of morally testing situations and by finally making her entry into the adult world or, to describe her adventures in the same way that Propp does the basic plot of the folktale, by proceeding from a condition of lack, through intermediary functions to

marriage,⁶ Catherine Morland fulfills the three-part pattern of all ritual, myth and fairytale. The condition of harmony that is established between the self and the world at the end of Northanger Abbey thus constitutes at once something as narrow as a statement of faith in the ability of eighteenth-century society to grant the individual complete personal fulfillment and something as broad as a statement of faith in the ability of every individual to navigate the difficult transitional periods of his life. Unless proper note is taken of the essentially mythopoeic structure of Northanger Abbey, it is impossible to understand that, rather than contradicting the essentially realistic tone of the rest of the novel, the effusively optimistic statement that Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland achieved "perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen" (252) carries something of the weight of the "they lived happily ever after" ending of the fairytale.

Despite its over-strenuous concern with satirising the Gothic novel and the novel of sensibility, which immediately tempts the reader to place it alongside such superior juvenile productions as Love and Freindship, Northanger Abbey constitutes a suitable prologue to the discussion of Jane Austen's mature achievement because of the manner in which it attempts to reconcile the particular and the universal implications of the initiation theme, and because it demonstrates a more than rudimentary awareness of the importance of the formal social occasion, both as a testing ground for the initiate heroine and as a structural agent.

CHAPTER III

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

While the hand of the immature artist is in many ways more obvious in Sense and Sensibility than in Northanger Abbey, so is that of the fully accomplished writer since, despite its serious technical deficiencies, the novel deals with a much wider range of characters, and with more subtle moral issues, than does the earlier work. Rather than having any real doubts about the relative worth of her finely discriminated characters, as many critics suggest, Jane Austen simply lacked the artistic control at this stage of her career to present her complex action lucidly. Thus, Elinor is unsympathetic not because Jane Austen was unable to suppress her sympathy for Marianne's free spirit, as Laurence Lerner and Marvin Mudrick argue,¹ but because she failed to dramatise sufficiently some of the most important parts of the extended debate between the two sisters. Similarly, if Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon appear dull, it is because Jane Austen was unable to integrate them properly into her novel, and not because they are products of an over-violent reaction against Willoughby.²

The structural and thematic weaknesses of Sense and Sensibility derive, in large part, from the way in which the formal social occasion is used. Although its world is much

more heavily populated, and hence more complicated than is that of Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility contains very few fully realised scenes organised around social rituals. The result is that the reader tends to become lost within a series of flickering and rapidly changing incidents and is compelled to accept the narrator's or Elinor's evaluation of characters whom he rarely sees in action. Although the issues raised in the novel's opening section are relatively clear, despite the fact that no one scene acquires any special significance, the reader is often forced to judge the characters by their theoretical response to the polite social occasion rather than by the way in which they behave within such a context. Only occasionally are such important issues as Colonel Brandon's concern for others, or Marianne and Willoughby's scorn for formality, demonstrated concretely, and at no point are all the major characters brought together and judged in direct relation to each other, as they are during the third ball in Northanger Abbey. Although it is structured to some extent around two central and quite fully developed incidents, Mrs. Jennings' dinner party and the evening party given by the Dashwoods, the novel's technical weaknesses become particularly obvious during the second section. Lacking sufficient points of focus, Jane Austen is unable to place enough stress on certain significant incidents, which thus become obscured beneath the rather complicated surface of the plot. The action of Sense and Sensibility becomes completely lucid only at the moment of the novel's climax

when all the major characters are grouped together around Marianne's sick-room, and final judgement is passed on each of them. Because of these technical weaknesses, Sense and Sensibility needs to be analysed extremely carefully in order that its blurred outlines may be brought into sharp relief.

In Sense and Sensibility, as in all of her novels, Jane Austen is concerned primarily with the problems encountered by a young woman in the process of making her entry into the adult world, and evaluates her characters according to the manner in which they respond to polite situations. Thus, although formal social occasions fail to play a sufficiently strong structural role in this novel, they nevertheless provide most of the keys to its meaning. For example, the significance of the extended comparisons drawn between Marianne Dashwood, the heroine undergoing the process of initiation, whose adherence to the creed of sensibility prevents her from acquiring a full understanding of the world around her, and her sister Elinor, a fully mature young woman who is acutely aware of the importance of polite conduct, cannot be understood properly unless their responses to and behaviour during polite social gatherings are contrasted.³ Initially, a simple dichotomy is established between the responsible Elinor and the selfishly immature Marianne. However, as the novel develops, Jane Austen not only continues to gauge the younger sister's faults against the social ideal embodied in the elder, but also begins to

suggest that, because of her stronger sense of individuality, Marianne is in some respects superior to Elinor. Thus, while Marianne is clearly to be condemned for her bad-tempered and childish rudeness to the foolish, but good-natured, Middletons and Mrs. Jennings, she attracts a considerable degree of sympathy for the stern rebukes that she hands out to the thoroughly selfish Mrs. Ferrars and John Dashwood during her visit to London. By remaining polite on all occasions, Elinor at first reveals an admirable sense of her obligations to others but, later, seems to be yielding up all claims of the self to the demands of propriety.

The effects of the deficiencies revealed by comparing Marianne to Elinor can be fully comprehended only if her response to, and relationship with, the other members of her social milieu are examined. Because Marianne judges everyone according to the demands of the code of sensibility, her evaluations of almost all of the important agents in her fate are inadequate. Thus, she prefers the dashing Willoughby to the much more obviously morally sound Colonel Brandon, and can see little difference between the extremely irritating, but harmless, Middletons, Mrs. Jennings and Palmers, and the selfish and mercenary Steele sisters, the John Dashwoods, and Mrs. Ferrars and her son, Robert. Yet, if these characters are judged by the way in which they behave within the social context, instead of by the quality of their sensibilities, there can be little doubt about their respective moral worth. For example, the sense of responsibility revealed by Colonel

Brandon in refusing to allow the trip to his relative's home at Whitwell to continue in his absence is completely lacking in Willoughby's decision to undertake an excursion, uninvited, and accompanied only by Marianne, to his aunt's house. Similarly, while the Middletons have little comprehension of the moral implications of good manners, they do not manipulate the formal social occasion towards their own ends as do the social-climbing Misses Steele. Thus, an examination of the role played by the formal social occasion in the first two sections of Sense and Sensibility serves to establish a firm sense of the moral hierarchy that becomes apparent to Marianne only after she has been brought close to death by her own irresponsible actions during the visit to Cleveland.

The introductory sections of Sense and Sensibility suggest that Marianne Dashwood's moral and social development will be paralleled by a similar progression towards maturity on the part of Edward Ferrars. Like Marianne, he possesses excellent personal qualities but is unable to perform within a social context. However, whereas she errs from a sense of superiority, Edward is held back by a feeling of inferiority that arises from his lack of pleasing manners and external charm. Unfortunately, what promises to be an enlightening counterpart to the story of Marianne soon peters out and is only fitfully rekindled. Edward Ferrars, perhaps more than any other character, is a victim of Jane Austen's failure to dramatise her action properly. On the rare occasions when he does make an appearance, he is not given

any dynamic role to play but is merely allowed to indulge in theoretical discussions with Marianne and Elinor about his own deficiencies and about the individual's social responsibilities. The whole novel is marred by Jane Austen's inability to give Edward Ferrars any real sense of presence or to show him overcoming his lack of social savoir faire, since the reader is unable to accept that he has acquired a sufficient degree of maturity to justify his final entry into marriage with Elinor.

Marianne Dashwood's adherence to the creed of sensibility derives not only from an inherent dislike of the restrictions imposed on the individual by his society but also from a very sensitive realisation of the faulty nature of social groups dominated by such people as the mercenary and heartless John Dashwoods and the vacuous Middletons. However, Jane Austen stresses throughout the first section of Sense and Sensibility that, in order to achieve any degree of personal fulfillment, she must learn to accept the world in which she is located and to judge its members according to their behaviour in concrete situations. What Marianne refuses to recognise is that, despite its degeneration into an empty form amongst the Middletons and into gross hypocrisy amongst the Misses Steele and the John Dashwoods, the observance of polite social conventions does not necessarily imply any loss of personal integrity. Rather, it is by the exercise of good manners and self-restraint that one expresses an awareness of the unique existence of others, and by observing

the way in which this display of respect is reciprocated, that one is able to evaluate the social worth of these others. Marianne is thus totally unjustified morally in refusing to honour her obligations towards the Middletons because she feels that they are negligent of her own claims to consideration. All that she achieves by her withdrawal is a complete loss of social perspective which is reflected in her preference for the glib charms of Willoughby over the solid virtues of Colonel Brandon, and in her inability to make moral distinctions between the Middletons and the Steele sisters. On one occasion, Elinor points out quite explicitly the misconceptions inherent in Marianne's attitude to good manners and their social role:

"But I thought it was right, Elinor," said Marianne, "to be guided wholly by the opinion of other people. I thought our judgments were given us merely to be subservient to those of our neighbours. This has always been your doctrine, I am sure."

"No, Marianne, never. My doctrine has never aimed at the subjection of the understanding. All I have ever attempted to influence has been the behaviour. You must not confound my meaning. I am guilty, I confess, of having often wished you to treat our acquaintance in general with greater attention; but when have I advised you to adopt their sentiments or conform to their judgment in serious matters?" (93-94)

Marianne's belief that she achieves openness and sincerity by refusing either to exercise self-restraint or to be polite to people whom she dislikes is partially justified by the good impression that she makes on Colonel Brandon, who comments that "there is something so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind, that one is sorry to see them give way to the reception of more general opinions" (56). However, as a comparison of the two sisters' attitudes to the

departure of their respective lovers reveals, such a rejection of accepted codes of behaviour results just as often in selfishness and lack of concern for others. Since Marianne refuses to recognise that she owes any obligations to the social group of which she is an unwilling part, she feels fully justified in trying to sever all communication with the Middletons once gatherings at their house have ceased to present opportunities for furthering her relationship with Willoughby. So narrowly egotistical is Marianne's conception of her sphere of proper concern that she is genuinely unable to comprehend what motives Mrs. Jennings could have for proposing a dance in Willoughby's absence:

Mrs. Jennings enforced the necessity. "And who knows but you may raise a dance," said she. "And that will tempt you, Miss Marianne."

"A dance!" cried Marianne. "Impossible! Who is to dance?" (99)

By treating social involvement in such an opportunist manner, Marianne is guilty of reducing the Middletons to the level of convenient objects that ~~she can~~ utilise whenever it is convenient for her to do so. The essential hypocrisy inherent in what Marianne, by taking only her personal feelings into account, believes to be an honest approach to experience, is made explicit when Elinor rebukes her for expressing hostility towards an invitation to dine with the Palmers:

"Why should they ask us?" said Marianne, as soon as they were gone. "The rent of this cottage is said to be low; but we have it on very hard terms, if we are to dine at the park whenever any one is staying either with them, or with us."

"They mean no less to be civil and kind to us now," said Elinor, "by these frequent invitations than by those which we received from them a few weeks ago. The alteration is not in them, if their parties are grown tedious and dull. We must

look for the change elsewhere." (109)

The limitations of a creed that demands of the individual only that he give sincere expression to his feelings are made even more obvious by the way in which Marianne behaves towards Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor after Willoughby's unexpected departure. So obsessed is she with her own sorrow that she spares no thought to the distress that her extreme and prolonged display of grief might be causing her devoted mother and sister. Thus, instead of playing the piano for its entertainment, she regales her family with a self-indulgent performance of tunes chosen because they remind her of Willoughby:

The evening passed off in the equal indulgence of feeling. She played over every favourite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby, every air in which their voices had been oftenest joined, and sat at the instrument gazing on every line of music that he had written out for her, till her heart was so heavy that no farther sadness could be gained; and this nourishment of grief was every day applied. (83)

Elinor, in direct contrast to Marianne, almost completely conceals her feelings after Edward has left precisely because she is concerned not to cause her family any unnecessary anxiety. Those readers who have agreed with Marianne's view that Elinor's conduct reveals a regrettable coldness and lack of true feeling do so in contradiction of Jane Austen's own comment:

Elinor sat down to her drawing-table as soon as he was out of the house, busily employed herself the whole day, neither sought nor avoided the mention of his name, appeared to interest herself almost as much as ever in the general concerns of the family, and if, by this conduct, she did not lessen her own grief, it was at least prevented from unnecessary increase, and her mother and sisters were spared much

solicitude on her account. (104)

Similarly, even though she is forced to face the whole Barton group on the morning after Edward's departure, when the Middletons and Mrs. Jennings arrive unexpectedly at the cottage with their new guests, the Palmers, Elinor does not shirk her social obligations in any way and greets the party with all the necessary display of politeness and consideration.

The way in which Elinor and Marianne's diametrically opposed codes of behaviour effect their response to their social milieu is perhaps best summed up by comparing the conduct of the two sisters during the Barton Park dinner party which they attend in company with Lady Middleton, Mrs. Jennings and the Misses Steele. In this scene, Jane Austen pursues the method, all too rarely employed in Sense and Sensibility, of juxtaposing characters within the restricted setting of the formal social occasion and allowing the reader to judge them by the way in which they react to the same, or very similar, situations. While she is bored by the whole affair, which produces "not one novelty of thought or expression" (143), and is extremely anxious to talk privately to Lucy Steele about her engagement to Edward Ferrars, Elinor nevertheless remains acutely conscious of her obligation to respect the wishes and feelings of her hostess. Thus, when her personal desire to talk to Lucy involves removing herself from the game of Casino in which the other guests are involved, Elinor is extremely careful that no offence be given

to Lady Middleton. Instead, she neatly extricates herself from the game of cards by making use of her ladyship's devotion to her children and offering to help Lucy finish making a basket for little Annamaria.

Elinor's concern that the harmony of the group not be disturbed even though, for personal reasons, she is forced to step outside of it contrasts sharply with Marianne's rude withdrawal from the card game to the solitude of the piano:

Lady Middleton proposed a rubber of Casino to the others. No one made any objection but Marianne, who, with her usual inattention to the forms of general civility, exclaimed, "Your ladyship will have the goodness to excuse me--you know I detest cards. I shall go to the piano-forte; I have not touched it since it was tuned." And without further ceremony, she turned away and walked to the instrument.

Lady Middleton looked as if she thanked heaven that she had never made so rude a speech. (144-145)

Once again, simply by giving expression to her own feelings, Marianne makes herself offensive to those with whom she comes into contact. Jane Austen's point is that, even when it is adopted by a "generous, amiable, interesting" (6) person like Marianne Dashwood, the creed of sensibility inevitably leads the individual astray because it takes no account of the social context in which he must function. Ironically, in seeking the kind of honesty that she believes can only be achieved by rejecting much of the polite surface of social intercourse, Marianne frequently becomes merely selfish, self-indulgent and rude. What she does not realise is that by being polite, one not only conveys a sense of respect for others, but one also demonstrates a sense of self-respect. In trying to avoid the possible hypocrisy involved in this

first function of good manners, Marianne unfortunately manages at the same time to defeat the second.

Besides inducing her to be too ready to express her bad opinion of others, and to be careless of the quality of her own behaviour, Marianne's refusal to pay any heed to the dictates of good manners has the even more unfortunate effect of depriving her of the ability to make accurate moral evaluations of the people with whom she comes into contact. In Marianne's view, Willoughby is far superior to Colonel Brandon because of his highly developed sensibility, and all the inhabitants and guests at Barton Park are equally worthless because of their total lack of this necessary faculty. Yet, judged entirely by the way in which they behave in polite situations, the Middletons, Mrs. Jennings and the Palmers emerge as harmless, if extremely irritating and socially naïve people, the Misses Steele as thoroughly unpleasant fortune hunters, Colonel Brandon as a man of indisputable merit and Willoughby as a pleasant, but morally suspect character.

Despite the great kindness displayed by Sir John Middleton in inviting the Dashwood family to occupy Barton Cottage, neither he nor his wife prove to have any of the qualities required to endear themselves further to Elinor and Marianne. Sir John's good nature and great personal warmth are offset by his lack of refined manners, while his wife is extremely elegant, but cold and reserved:

Her manners had all the elegance which her husband's wanted. But they would have been improved by some share of his frankness and warmth; and her visit was long enough to detract something from their first admiration, by shewing that though

perfectly well-bred, she was reserved, cold, and had nothing to say for herself beyond the most common-place inquiry or remark. (31)

Even more important, neither regards social involvement as a source of fulfillment, but merely as a means of escaping from his personal limitations:

They were scarcely ever without some friends staying with them in the house, and they kept more company of every kind than any other family in the neighbourhood. It was necessary to the happiness of both; for however dissimilar in temper and outward behaviour, they strongly resembled each other in that total want of talent and taste which confined their employments, unconnected with such as society produced, within a very narrow compass. Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. (32)

Consequently, the Middletons' indiscriminately formed social evenings prove to be extremely unpleasant. Their first dinner party, for example, is characterised by an almost total want of good manners and decorum. Since the host judges the gathering only by its size no attempt is made to check either the embarrassing remarks passed by the friendly, but vulgarly nouveau riche, Mrs. Jennings about Elinor and Marianne's possible lovers, or the boisterous interruptions of the children, which Lady Middleton regards as an adequate substitute for good conversation. The pattern established here is repeated throughout almost all of the evening parties held at Barton Park, and while the impetuous Marianne makes little attempt to conceal her annoyance at the indignities which she is compelled to suffer at the hands of Mrs. Jennings or her boredom at the lack of intelligent conversation, even the more reserved and charitable Elinor feels a great sense of dissatisfaction:

Elinor's happiness was not so great. Her heart was not so much at ease, nor her satisfaction in their amusements so pure. They afforded her no companion that could make amends for what she had left behind, nor that could teach her to think of Norland with less regret than ever. (54)

The arrival of Mrs. Jennings' daughter and her husband does nothing to improve the situation. The Palmers' first visit to Barton Cottage reveals that they deviate from the social norm in a comically antithetical manner similar to that of the Middletons, the over-civility of the wife balancing the rudeness of the husband:

He entered the room with a look of self-consequence, slightly bowed to the ladies, without speaking a word, and, after briefly surveying them and their apartments, took up a newspaper from the table and continued to read it as long as he staid.

Mrs. Palmer, on the contrary, who was strongly endowed by nature with a turn for being uniformly civil and happy, was hardly seated before her admiration of the parlour and every thing in it burst forth. (106-107)

The dinner party that is given in their honour is predictably tedious. Mrs. Palmer is as silly as before and Mr. Palmer climaxes a series of rude remarks about the inadequacies of the weather, Barton Park and Willoughby's home at Combe Magna by flatly insulting Mrs. Jennings:

"You and I, Sir John," said Mrs. Jennings, "should not stand upon such ceremony."

"Then you would be very ill-bred," cried Mr. Palmer. (111)

However, although the generally good-natured mood of Barton society is temporarily broken by these words, even Mr. Palmer's bad manners, which Elinor realises derive from a rather childish desire to prove his superiority to the world around him, are harmless compared to the deceitful and hypocritical façade of benevolence adopted by the next visitors,

the Steele sisters. While the Middletons can be held indirectly responsible for the presence of such vicious elements in society, because they lack the moral faculties needed to discriminate between those who should be accepted and those who should be avoided, there is a generic difference between their failure to comprehend the more serious implications of good manners and the Misses Steeles' manipulation of polite social intercourse towards their own selfish ends.

Elinor soon realises that although, at first sight, their behaviour seems to be similar to that of the uncritically friendly Mrs. Palmer, the Steele sisters are in reality penniless opportunists feigning an admiration of everyone and everything in order to gain the invitations to visit relatives and acquaintances upon which they depend for a comfortable existence. Thus, their complaisant attitude towards the Middleton children derives entirely from a desire to ingratiate themselves with Lady Middleton. As relatives of their host, Elinor and Marianne are also subjected to hypocritical friendliness and meaningless compliments:

They came from Exeter, well provided with admiration for the use of Sir John Middleton, his family, and all his relations, and no niggardly proportion was now dealt out to his fair cousins, whom they declared to be the most beautiful, elegant, accomplished and agreeable girls they had ever beheld, and with whom they were particularly anxious to be better acquainted. (124)

While she remains outwardly civil to the Steele sisters, and even answers with tact and politeness Lucy's fatuous demands that she acquiesce to her view of the excellence of the Middletons and their children, Elinor judges them according

to her usual strict moral standards:

This specimen of the Miss Steeles was enough. The vulgar freedom and folly of the eldest left her no recommendation, and as Elinor was not blinded by the beauty, or the shrewd look of the youngest, to her want of real elegance and artlessness, she left the house without any wish of knowing them better. (124)

Thus, it is one of the most important indications of Marianne's lack of social perspective that she is unable to understand, as Elinor does, that while they might also be guilty of "vulgar freedom and folly," the Middletons and their relatives are to be preferred to the Misses Steele because they cannot be accused of possessing either "shrewd" looks or "want of . . . artlessness." Recognising only that both groups are distasteful to her sensibility Marianne does her best to exclude herself from all company.

Even more important, so far as Marianne's immediate fortunes are concerned, is the inadequacy of her response to both Colonel Brandon and Willoughby. Jane Austen underlines the irony implicit in the situation created when Marianne allows herself to be drawn away from a man who can bring her happiness towards one who can only foster her worst tendencies by closely juxtaposing scenes involving her two suitors. Thus, the more Marianne becomes attached to Willoughby, the more heavily is Brandon's worth stressed. The differences between the two men and the limitations of Marianne's subjective approach to experience are firmly established by the scenes in which Brandon and Willoughby are introduced, and further emphasised by implicit and explicit comparisons of their later behaviour.

Colonel Brandon makes his first appearance within the polite setting of a dinner party at Barton Park and immediately distinguishes himself by being the only one of the guests to pay Marianne the compliment of listening attentively to her performance at the piano:

Marianne's performance was highly applauded. Sir John was loud in his admiration at the end of every song, and as loud in his conversation with the others while every song lasted. Lady Middleton frequently called him to order, wondered how any one's attention could be diverted from music for a moment, and asked Marianne to sing a particular song which Marianne had just finished. Colonel Brandon alone, of all the party, heard her without being in raptures. He paid her only the compliment of attention. (35)

However, although she is not completely blind to the value of Brandon's good manners, Marianne is more concerned with his lack of fine sensibility:

His pleasure in music, though it amounted not to that extatic delight which alone could sympathize with her own, was estimable when contrasted against the horrible insensibility of the others; and she was reasonable enough to allow that a man of five and thirty might well have outlived all acuteness of feeling and every exquisite power of enjoyment. (35)

Yet, if his action is judged on its own merits, and not according to the standards of an abstract code, Brandon has behaved impeccably. Indeed, the neat tableau presented here by Jane Austen, in which Brandon stands out sharply against a background dominated by vulgarity and bad manners, suggests that, like Elinor, he represents one of the ideals towards which Marianne should be striving.

The manner in which Willoughby makes his appearance is much more to Marianne's taste since he is introduced to her, not according to the rules of polite convention, but by a timely intervention at a moment of maidenly distress.

Having gone walking with her sister, Margaret, Marianne has the misfortune to fall and hurt her ankle, but is almost immediately swept up, in true heroic fashion, into the arms of Willoughby. It is this striking deed, and the gallant appearance with which he supports it, rather than any evidence of real worth, that makes Willoughby immediately attractive to Marianne. She is concerned only that "His person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story" (43). Her reasons for continuing to find him interesting are equally intangible, since they derive from the sound of his name, his residence being in her favourite village, and his shooting jacket being the most becoming of all manly dresses. Marianne's manner of judging is scarcely less inadequate than that of Sir John Middleton to whom she turns for further information. In response to her enquiry concerning Willoughby's pursuits, talents and genius, Sir John declares that he knows little about those, but that "he is a pleasant, good humoured fellow, and has got the nicest little black bitch of a pointer I ever saw" (44). Both Marianne and Sir John approach experience in a totally narcissistic way, she evaluating everything against the standards of the creed of sensibility, and he according to the values of the hunting world. Elinor, on the other hand, refuses to accept Willoughby's pleasing appearance as sufficient proof of his worth, but judges him also by the way in which he behaves in polite situations and tries, whenever the opportunity arises, to find out more

about his background.

The essential differences suggested here can be fully confirmed by contrasting Brandon and Willoughby's later conduct, particularly within the context of the formal social occasion. The pattern of Willoughby and Marianne's relationship is so firmly established by their first encounter that when they meet again both assume that reserve and formality unnecessarily hinder intercourse between two people of sensibility. The eager manner in which they pour out their enthusiasms and beliefs finally forces Elinor to intervene and point out that they are offending against the rules of polite conduct. Unfortunately, Elinor's attempt at guiding her sister is foiled not only by Marianne's wilful blindness but also by Mrs. Dashwood's ill-considered comments:

"Elinor," cried Marianne, "is this fair? is this just? are my ideas so scanty? But I see what you mean. I have been too much at my ease, too happy, too frank. I have erred against every common-place notion of decorum; I have been open and sincere where I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful:--had I talked only of the weather and the roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes, this reproach would have been spared."

"My love," said her mother, "you must not be offended with Elinor--she was only in jest. I should scold her myself, if she were capable of wishing to check the delight of your conversation with our new friend." (47-48)

So obsessed do Marianne and Willoughby become with one another that they make no effort to modify the external display of their affection even during the evening parties held at Barton Park. Ignoring their obligations to the other guests, they repeatedly isolate themselves within an hermetically sealed world of their own:

When he was present she had no eyes for any one else. Every

thing he did, was right. Every thing he said, was clever. If their evenings at the park were concluded with cards, he cheated himself and all the rest of the party to get her a good hand. If dancing formed the amusement of the night, they were partners for half the time; and when obliged to separate for a couple of dances, were careful to stand together and scarcely spoke a word to any body else. (53-54)

So far as Elinor is concerned, such public demonstrations of intimacy by a couple who are not engaged are totally improper. Yet, even though his attempt to make Marianne a present of a horse and his persistent use of her christian name in conversation convinces Elinor that this external mark of their love will soon be forthcoming, Willoughby eventually leaves Barton Valley without making any formal statement of his intentions. Her mother's theory that they are secretly engaged does little to settle Elinor's qualms:

"It may be proper to conceal their engagement (if they are engaged) from Mrs. Smith--and if that is the case, it must be highly expedient for Willoughby to be but little in Devonshire at present. But this is no excuse for their concealing it from us."

"Concealing it from us! my dear child, do you accuse Willoughby and Marianne of concealment? This is strange indeed, when your eyes have been reproaching them every day for incautiousness."

"I want no proof of their affection," said Elinor; "but of their engagement I do." (79)

For Elinor the very concept of a secret engagement is an anomaly because the function of a betrothal is to demonstrate honourable intentions to the world at large.

Not only is Willoughby guilty of leading Marianne morally astray, but he also succeeds in blinding her completely to Colonel Brandon's worth. Thus, when Elinor tries to defend Brandon from one of Marianne's unfair attacks, she suddenly finds herself faced with two opponents. While

Marianne once again argues that he possesses "neither genius, taste nor spirit" (51), Willoughby derides him for his connections with the Middleton family.

In contrast to Marianne and Willoughby, Colonel Brandon continues to behave impeccably at all times. In general, he makes the Middletons' social evenings bearable for Elinor, who deems him the one person in her circle "who could in any degree claim the respect of abilities, excite the interest of friendship, or give pleasure as a companion" (55), and, on one occasion, is able to be of particular service to her. When Mrs. Jennings and Margaret embarrass Elinor by pressing her to reveal the name of her lover, only Colonel Brandon is truly concerned with restoring her ease. Seizing on Lady Middleton's interruption he manages to divert the conversation completely:

Most grateful did Elinor feel to Lady Middleton for observing at this moment, "that it rained very hard," though she believed the interruption to proceed less from any attention to her, than from her ladyship's great dislike of all such inelegant subjects of raillery as delighted her husband and mother. The idea however started by her, was immediately pursued by Colonel Brandon, who was on every occasion mindful of the feelings of others; and much was said on the subject of rain by both of them. (62)

Although Willoughby completes the restoration of order by asking Marianne to play the piano, he is probably inspired less by consideration for Elinor than by boredom at Colonel Brandon's comments on the weather.

As in Emma, in which even Harriet realises that Mr. Knightley's kindness in dancing with her at the Crown ball is worth more than Frank Churchill's romantic rescue from the

gypsies, so, in Sense and Sensibility, Colonel Brandon proves his worth far more decisively by these small displays of consideration than does Willoughby in coming to Marianne's aid in a moment of very obvious distress. In Jane Austen's view many men have the potentiality for acting gallantly in the latter kind of situation, but only a few for being consistently alert to the minor crises of polite intercourse.

The essential differences between Colonel Brandon and Willoughby can be summed up by contrasting their behaviour on the day of the proposed excursion to Whitwell. Colonel Brandon's acute concern with propriety and his respect for others is revealed once again when he calls off the trip to Whitwell because he cannot accompany the party. Although his action incurs general, and rather outspoken, displeasure, Brandon does not falter from his resolution because he realises that it would be improper to allow anyone to intrude into his brother-in-law's house unless he could be present to secure admittance. His behaviour compares very favourably with Marianne and Willoughby's since they not only break away from the driving party that is arranged to replace the Whitwell trip but, as it emerges later, also engage in an uninvited visit to Mrs. Smith's house at Allenham. Unlike Colonel Brandon, Willoughby clearly has little respect either for his relative and her property, or for Marianne, whom he has compromised into engaging in a tête-à-tête carriage ride to view what Mrs. Jennings assumes is to be her future home.

The diametrically opposed theoretical assumptions

about the individual and his relation to the world around him that underlie these different approaches to experience are demonstrated very clearly during the argument between Elinor and Marianne about the visit to Allenham:

"I am afraid," replied Elinor, "that the pleasantness of an employment does not always evince its propriety."

"On the contrary, nothing can be a stronger proof of it, Elinor; for if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when we are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure." (68)

Like Adam Smith, Elinor and Colonel Brandon are extremely sceptical of the efficacy of the Shaftesburian concept of innate moral sense and prefer to gauge conduct by its propriety within a social context. Until she learns to do the same Marianne will inevitably continue to make inadequate evaluations of the worth of those around her.

In the midst of this exploration of the nature, scope and consequences of Marianne's self-imposed alienation from society the potential second main theme is only briefly revived. During a long conversation about conduct with Marianne and Elinor, Edward himself emphasises that his social deficiencies, which derive from shyness and a sense of inferiority, are no more excusable than Marianne's:

"You have not been able then to bring your sister over to your plan of general civility," said Edward to Elinor. "Do you gain no ground?"

"Quite the contrary," replied Elinor, looking expressively at Marianne.

"My judgment," he returned, "is all on your side of the question; but I am afraid my practice is much more on your sister's. I never wish to offend, but I am so foolishly shy, that I often seem negligent, when I am only kept back by my natural awkwardness. I have frequently thought that I must have been intended by nature to be fond of low company, I am so little at my ease among strangers of gentility!"

"Marianne has not shyness to excuse any inattention of hers," said Elinor.

"She knows her own worth too well for false shame," replied Edward. "Shyness is only the effect of a sense of inferiority in some way or other. If I could persuade myself that my manners were perfectly easy and graceful, I should not be shy." (94)

Unlike Darcy, who feels that his initial rudeness to Elizabeth Bennet can be justified by pleading shyness, Edward realises that it is his duty to acquire the gentility and easy manners required to facilitate social intercourse. Further discussion reveals that Edward's sense of inferiority derives from his lack of a proper social role. Prevented from entering the Church by his family's disapproval and not wishing to become a lawyer or a sailor, the only other professions open to a man in his social position, Edward simply allowed himself to be entered at Oxford at the age of eighteen and has remained idle ever since. As Mingay points out, the acquisition of a degree at either of the two English Universities during this period required nothing more arduous than keeping the terms.⁴

Edward's problems receive little treatment after this and the reader is forced to accept that, by becoming a clergyman and by being freed of the unnatural reserve imposed on him by his secret engagement to Lucy Steele, he finally acquires sufficient self-confidence to develop into a fully mature individual. Although Edward becomes rather superfluous to the novel's main development, the connection made here between social grace and employment is central to Jane Austen's view of the role of manners in society. Edward's lack of ease shows his realisation that manners should be a reflection

of the whole man and not merely a smooth façade behind which the self is concealed during social intercourse. His shortcomings are thus viewed much more sympathetically by Jane Austen than are those of Sir Walter Elliot, for whom surface display is all. To him it is important to act like a baronet, but not to carry out the duties involved in the position.

Jane Austen's failure to find an adequate place in her story for so important a character as Edward Ferrars demonstrates very clearly that, at this stage of her artistic career, she did not have the ability to erect a structure capable of carrying the burden of her complicated action. The flaws visible in the first part of the novel derive mainly from her inadequate use of the individual scene. So sparse are fully realised scenes that Jane Austen is deprived of sufficient opportunities either to show her characters in action or to group them together in order that they might be judged, as are the Mansfield group during the amateur theatricals, by their reaction to a single situation. Colonel Brandon suffers more than any other character from the first of these deficiencies because, although his good qualities are clearly illustrated not only by Elinor's comments, but also by the way in which he behaves on several occasions, he does not act often enough to acquire the vitality needed to avoid the frequently reiterated charge that he is the least satisfactory of all Jane Austen's heroes.⁵ Similarly, Marianne has often been considered as a rather one-dimensional character because Elinor and Colonel Brandon's assertions

about her better qualities do not sufficiently counteract the impression conveyed by concrete demonstrations of her selfishness. However, the second deficiency is even more important because, by failing to bring her characters together, Jane Austen makes it hard for the reader to focus on the subtle moral discriminations upon which her action is based. The scene located around Marianne's piano during which Brandon proves his superiority to the Middletons, that in which Elinor's politeness in excusing herself from the game of Casino is contrasted with Marianne's rudeness, and the closely juxtaposed episodes in which Brandon and Willoughby demonstrate their different attitudes to the duties involved in visiting a relative's house, only partly compensate for the absence of one or two scenes in which all the major characters can be judged in direct relation to one another. The clarity of Jane Austen's action is further blurred by her failure, with the exception of the episodes dealing with Marianne's relationship with Willoughby and Brandon, to pattern her scenes in such a way as to reflect concretely the development of her plot.

In the second section of Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen continues to emphasise the limitations of Marianne's egocentric approach to experience, but she also begins to place rather more stress on the positive aspects of her heroine's character. Thus, while Marianne is made to appear extremely ridiculous by her continued inability to comprehend a world in which the moral distinctions established during

the Barton episodes become increasingly obvious, she nevertheless wins the reader's sympathy on several occasions by actively demonstrating her basic kindness and good nature. This emphasis on Marianne's essential virtue is necessary if the reader is to accept that she does eventually become worthy of Colonel Brandon, and that the perfect integration between self and society that she achieves is something more significant than an arbitrary resolution of plot complications. As she shows in her treatment of Mary Crawford, Jane Austen did not believe that the kind of moral progress made by Marianne is possible for anyone whose nature is in any way truly vicious.

Although her heroine is apparently no nearer to maturity at the end of her visit to Mrs. Jennings' home than she was at the beginning, Jane Austen fully prepares the way for the denouement of her action during this section, and it needs only the shock of a near-suicidal escapade at Cleveland for Marianne to realise the significance of her experience in London. Thus, Willoughby's desertion of the creed of sensibility in favour of an economically advantageous marriage, the revelation that Elinor has been suffering as much as herself, the consistently virtuous conduct of Colonel Brandon and Mrs. Jennings' repeated display of real kindness are all finally responsible for forcing Marianne to seek a personal redefinition. Even the John Dashwoods and Mrs. Ferrars and Robert, who initially reinforce Marianne's social alienation by repeatedly demonstrating their economically based value

system, serve to illuminate the good qualities of the Middletons, Mrs. Jennings and the Palmers.

Because of the increasingly complicated nature of the plot, and because of Jane Austen's continued failure to place proper emphasis on some of the most important parts of her action, the reader is obliged to pay very close attention to the issues either raised or summarised during the two fully realised social rituals, Mrs. Jennings' dinner party and the John Dashwoods' evening party, around which the visit to London is organised. The inadequacy of Marianne's approach to experience is stressed in both of these scenes, but the more admirable aspects of her personality and some of Elinor's limitations begin to emerge during the second. However, the complications added to what was, in the first section, a relatively straightforward debate between Elinor's "sense" and Marianne's "sensibility" cannot be comprehended properly unless several other important, but less well-emphasised incidents are taken into account. Thus, only by distinguishing certain crucial episodes from such comparatively slight, but equally fully developed, scenes such as the evening party during which Elinor's poor opinion of Robert Ferrars is confirmed and the farcical interlude during which Mrs. Jennings is led to believe that Colonel Brandon has proposed to Elinor, can the reader hope to grasp the significance of Jane Austen's action. The limitations of Elinor's concern with propriety, which first emerge during her encounter with Mrs. Ferrars, are evident on two further occasions. On the first of these,

Marianne is forced to reprimand her for attempting to conceal all emotion even after the news of Edward's engagement to Lucy has become public, and on the second, in contrast to Mrs. Jennings and her indignant sister, she politely suffers John Dashwood to pass disparaging comments about Edward Ferrars. However, Jane Austen has not simply reversed her attitude to the two sisters, and Elinor is viewed more sympathetically on two other occasions. The value of her concern for propriety is made obvious during the scene in which she manages to preserve a semblance of harmony despite being faced by both Lucy and Edward, and her ability to be self-assertive while remaining within the boundaries of propriety is revealed during a later private encounter with John Dashwood. It emerges from a comparison of these episodes that, while she has the vitality required to achieve an even greater degree of maturity than her sister, Marianne must still look towards Elinor for guidance.

Initially, the visit to London serves only to emphasise further both the selfish implications of the creed of sensibility and the way in which it limits the individual's response to the world around him. Thus, the tone of much of the section is very firmly established by the manner in which Marianne overrides Elinor's objections to the propriety of accepting Mrs. Jennings invitation simply because it offers her a chance of renewing her acquaintance with Willoughby. Her selfishness on this occasion is two-fold since she shows concern neither for the wishes of her sister nor for the

obligations normally incurred by the guest in accepting an invitation. Marianne continues to behave in the same fashion both before and after she is rejected by Willoughby. During the journey to London she is so involved with her own thoughts that she leaves Elinor to fulfill all the polite obligations due to their hostess, Mrs. Jennings:

They were three days on their journey, and Marianne's behaviour as they travelled was a happy specimen of what her future complaisance and companionableness to Mrs. Jennings might be expected to be. She sat in silence almost all the way, wrapt in her own meditations, and scarcely ever voluntarily speaking, except when any object of picturesque beauty within their view drew from her an exclamation of delight exclusively addressed to her sister. To atone for this conduct therefore, Elinor took immediate possession of the post of civility which she had assigned herself, behaved with the greatest attention to Mrs. Jennings, talked with her, laughed with her, and listened to her whenever she could. (160)

She is similarly too occupied after her arrival in London with writing letters to Willoughby and waiting for him to call to pay any attention to Mrs. Jennings or her friends, Colonel Brandon, the Palmers and the Middletons. So neglectful is Marianne of the claims of others at this stage that when Willoughby disappoints her by absenting himself from Sir John Middleton's impromptu ball she immediately withdraws from all social involvement:

Marianne gave one glance round the apartment as she entered; it was enough, he was not there--and she sat down, equally ill-disposed to receive or communicate pleasure. (171)

Lacking Willoughby as a partner she can derive no pleasure from the prospect of engaging herself in the social microcosm of the dance: "Never had Marianne been so unwilling to dance in her life, as she was that evening, and never so much

fatigued by the exercise." (171)

Not only is Marianne's failure to see beyond matters of immediate concern to herself extremely rude, but it also blinds her to what is happening in the world around her. Thus, she fails to recognise, as Elinor does, either Mrs. Jennings' improved behaviour or the increasingly obvious signs that Colonel Brandon is in love with her:

The Miss Dashwoods had no greater reason to be dissatisfied with Mrs. Jennings's style of living, and set of acquaintance, than with her behaviour to themselves, which was invariably kind. Every thing in her household arrangements was conducted on the most liberal plan, and excepting a few old city friends, whom, to Lady Middleton's regret, she had never dropped, she visited no one, to whom an introduction could at all discompose the feelings of her young companions.

. . . . Colonel Brandon, who had a general invitation to the house, was with them almost every day; he came to look at Marianne and talk to Elinor, who often derived more satisfaction from conversing with him than from any other daily occurrence, but who saw at the same time with much concern his continued regard for his sister. (168-169)

The selfish dream-world into which Marianne has allowed herself to lapse is shattered at the next ball when she is snubbed by Willoughby. In marked contrast to his previously uninhibited familiarity Willoughby is excessively formal and makes only the most token acknowledgement of Marianne's presence. Thus, when he does finally take recourse to polite convention, Willoughby's aim is to avert rather than to further social intercourse:

At last he turned round again, and regarded them both; she started up, and pronouncing his name in a tone of affection, held out her hand to him. He approached, and addressing himself rather to Elinor than Marianne, as if wishing to avoid her eye and determined not to observe her attitude, inquired in a hurried manner after Mrs. Dashwood, and asked how long they had been in town. (176)

It is extremely ironic that a man of sensibility, whose rejection of formality was based in part upon an awareness that manners can become a façade behind which the real self is concealed, should use them in precisely this way.

Having relied for so long on the guidance of her own feelings Marianne has no resources to fall back on when they are proven wrong. Knowing that Willoughby has mistreated her, but lacking any means of understanding his motives, she makes a pathetically inadequate attempt at blaming the world which she has always tended to view in an abstract manner as the oppressor of men of sensibility:

"Elinor, I have been cruelly used; but not by Willoughby."

"Dearest Marianne, who but himself? By whom can he have been instigated?"

"By all the world, rather than by his own heart. I could rather believe every creature of my acquaintance leagued together to ruin me in his opinion, than believe his nature capable of such cruelty." (189)

Marianne's immediate desire to return home once the visit has ceased to offer her any chance of personal satisfaction, and her inability to understand why Elinor should compel her to fulfill her obligations to Mrs. Jennings, show that even this profound shock has done nothing to broaden her social perspective:

"Elinor, I must go home. I must go and comfort mama. Cannot we be gone to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, Marianne!"

"Yes; why should I stay here? I came only for Willoughby's sake--and now who cares for me? Who regards me?"

"It would be impossible to go to-morrow. We owe Mrs. Jennings much more than civility; and civility of the commonest kind must prevent such hasty removal as that."

"Well, then, another day or two, perhaps; but I cannot stay here long, I cannot stay to endure the questions

and remarks of all these people." (190-191)

Although she agrees to stay Marianne continues to exempt herself from company whenever possible and thus contrives to be almost as rude as if she had actually gone home.

The issues dealt with discursively up to this point in the visit to London are crystallised during Mrs. Jennings' dinner party at which Marianne continues to behave selfishly and to be blind to the world around her even though Mrs. Jennings and Colonel Brandon's virtues and Willoughby's vices become increasingly apparent in the course of the evening. The implicit link between Marianne's selfishness and her lack of social perspective, both of which derive from her adherence to the creed of sensibility, is reflected concretely in the physical movement of this scene. Thus, by placing her own selfish needs before her obligations as a guest, and retiring to the solitude of her own bedroom rather than suffer Mrs. Jennings' rather clumsy attempts at comforting her, Marianne deprives herself of opportunities to learn the full truth about Willoughby and to observe Colonel Brandon's admirable behaviour. Marianne's physical exclusion from the group on this occasion is analogous to the manner in which she effectively isolates herself at other times by her persistence in judging everything according to the dictates of her sensibility. Had she remained in the room she would have been just as blind to the significance of what was going on around her.

Any possibility that Willoughby might be blameless is

removed when Mrs. Jennings tells Elinor, after her sister's departure, that his strange reaction to Marianne at the ball was inspired by his engagement to Miss Grey who has little to recommend her besides a fortune of £50,000. Ironically, it was the debts incurred by his lack of moderation as a man of sensibility that compelled Willoughby to seek an economically advantageous marriage. This demonstration of opportunism and selfishness, which goes far beyond even the worst excesses caused by Marianne's sensibility, contrasts sharply with the modest and considerate manner in which Colonel Brandon behaves throughout the evening. In spite of Mrs. Jennings' anticipation that he will be overjoyed at the removal of his rival, Colonel Brandon is extremely subdued because he is far more concerned with Marianne's suffering than with any increase in his own chances of winning her hand:

Mrs. Jennings, who had watched them with pleasure while they were talking, and who expected to see the effect of Miss Dashwood's communication, in such an instantaneous gaiety on Colonel Brandon's side, as might have become a man in the bloom of youth, of hope and happiness, saw him, with amazement, remain the whole evening more serious and thoughtful than usual. (200)

The solid and unpretentious nature of Colonel Brandon's virtues is underlined by Mrs. Jennings' description of Delaford which, like Pemberly and Donwell Abbey, accurately reflects the character of its owner:

"Delaford is a nice place, I can tell you; exactly what I call a nice old fashioned place, full of comforts and conveniences; quite shut in with great garden walls that are covered with the best fruit-trees in the country: and such a mulberry-tree in one corner!" (196-197)

Brandon's selflessness is further emphasised and the

picture of Willoughby's depravity is completed on the morning following the dinner party by the former's revelation of the latter's disreputable behaviour with Miss Williams. While he was not prepared to blacken Willoughby's reputation so long as they were rivals for Marianne's affection, Brandon does so when he believes that it might help to alleviate her sorrow. Unfortunately, Marianne's complete lack of social perspective prevents her from turning this information to profitable purpose, either by reducing her feelings for Willoughby or by increasing her regard for Colonel Brandon. Just as she was physically isolated from the group during Mrs. Jennings' dinner party, so is Marianne, on this occasion, effectively excluded from sharing in the truths that can be understood only by those who take their place within the complex web of social involvement.

The limitations imposed on Marianne's view of society by her adherence to the creed of sensibility are also evident in her failure to distinguish between the Middletons and the Palmers, and the group comprising the John Dashwoods and Mrs. Ferrars and Robert. While the Middletons and the Palmers do not reveal any previously hidden qualities equal to those uncovered in Mrs. Jennings, they do demonstrate a rudimentary sense of consideration for others by managing to restrain their great curiosity about Willoughby in Marianne's company. Moreover, Sir John does not even allow his admiration for Willoughby's qualities as a hunter to blind him to the seriousness of the offence done to Marianne:

Sir John could not have thought it possible. "A man of whom he had always had such reason to think well! Such a good-natured fellow! He did not believe there was a bolder rider in England! It was an unaccountable business. He wished him at the devil with all his heart. He would not speak another word to him, meet him where he might, for all the world!" (214)

As Willoughby himself later admits, Sir John is faithful to his promise until the day he feels compelled to advise him of Marianne's illness.

The essential worth of these socially crude but good-hearted people is underlined by the selfish and economically orientated behaviour of the John Dashwoods and Mrs. Ferrars and Robert. The Dashwood sisters first encounter Robert Ferrars in Gray's shop. Not only are his repeated stares and refusal to hasten his purchase extremely rude, but the attention that he pays to the choice of a tooth-pick case is the mark of self-indulgent fastidiousness. However, because of the economic basis of all his judgements, John Dashwood, whom Elinor and Marianne meet as they come out of the shop, is even more objectionable, despite the correctness of his manners and the friendliness of his response to them. His deficiencies are comprehensively satirised by Jane Austen from the first moment that he speaks. His enthusiasm for Mrs. Jennings, Colonel Brandon and Mrs. Ferrars derives entirely from a respect for their wealth, while his feelings for Elinor are greatly enhanced by the belief that she will marry Brandon. When he is not too occupied with discussing the financial position of others, he complains about his own lack of prosperity. However, Elinor's close questioning reveals that the alterations to her former home have produced an aesthetic

rather than an economic loss because he has cut down the walnut trees to make room for a greenhouse. John Dashwood's lack of respect for the traditional stability symbolised by the trees places him alongside Jane Austen's other irresponsible "improvers," General Tilney, Robert Ferrars, Rushworth and Henry Crawford.

The debunking of John Dashwood, whose stupidity makes him a far less serious proposition than the rather vague, but menacing, figure of his wife, Fanny, and Mrs. Ferrars, is completed later when he displays a complete inability to understand Colonel Brandon's altruistic motives for offering the Delaford living to Edward:

"It is perfectly true.--Colonel Brandon has given the living of Delaford to Edward."

"Really!--Well, this is very astonishing!--no relationship!--no connection between them!--and now that livings fetch such a price!--what was the value of this?"

"About two hundred a-year."

"Very well--and for the next presentation to a living of that value--supposing the late incumbent to have been old and sickly, and likely to vacate it soon--he might have got I dare say--fourteen hundred pounds. And how came he not to have settled that matter before this person's death?--Now indeed it would be too late to sell it, but a man of Colonel Brandon's sense!--I wonder he should be so improvident in a point of such common, such natural, concern!--Well, I am convinced that there is a vast deal of inconsistency in almost every human character." (294-295)

The generic differences between the Middleton and John Dashwood worlds are epitomised by the Dashwoods' evening party. The evening as a whole is no more nor less tedious than those at Barton Park, and Elinor's judgement of it could apply equally well to many earlier occasions:

John Dashwood had not much to say for himself that was worth hearing, and his wife had still less. But there was no peculiar disgrace in this, for it was very much the case with the chief of their visitors, who almost all laboured under

one or other of these disqualifications for being agreeable--Want of sense, either natural or improved--want of elegance--want of spirit--or want of temper. (233)

Even the ladies' after dinner conversation is devoted to the topic of children, the subject dearest to Lady Middleton's heart, and one with which she had frequently bored Elinor and Marianne in the past. However, the proceedings degenerate below the level of harmless mediocrity and assume a much more unpleasant tone when Mrs. Ferrars allows her dislike for Elinor, based on what she believes to be her presumptuous affection for Edward, to manifest itself in outright rudeness. Unlike the rebuke given to Mrs. Jennings by Mr. Palmer, which arose from nothing more sinister than temporary irritation, Mrs. Ferrars' attempt to divert the conversation away from the screens painted by Elinor to the subject of Miss Morton's accomplishments is intended to reflect her evaluation of the relative worth of the two young ladies. Besides being guilty of gross rudeness in expressing her view of Elinor's inferiority, Mrs. Ferrars does not even base her judgement on sound criteria. As her rather heated argument with Marianne reveals, Mrs. Ferrars' estimation of Miss Morton's worth depends entirely on her being the daughter of the late Lord Morton, from whom she inherited £30,000:

"This is admiration of a very particular kind!--what is Miss Morton to us?--who knows, or who cares, for her?--it is Elinor of whom we think and speak."

And so saying, she took the screens out of her sister-in-law's hands, to admire them herself as they ought to be admired.

Mrs. Ferrars looked exceedingly angry, and drawing herself up more stiffly than ever, pronounced in retort this bitter phillippic; "Miss Morton is Lord Morton's daughter."
(235-236)

Although Marianne, as she reveals here, is capable of understanding the dehumanising effects of adherence to an economic ethic, she is still no nearer to admitting that, at least by comparison, the Barton group is not without merit. Thus, the sense of contempt that Marianne shows for Mrs. Ferrars on this occasion is scarcely more extreme than that which is implicit in her very obvious desire to leave Mrs. Jennings' home as soon as possible.

Up to this point in the second section of Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen has been mainly concerned with reiterating her earlier criticisms of Marianne's approach to experience and with illustrating further how it limits her response to the world around her. Thus, in the first of the two fully developed rituals which serve to bring the action into focus, Marianne's selfishness and her inability to understand the worth of Colonel Brandon and Mrs. Jennings is demonstrated, and in the second, her blindness to the crucial moral differences between the Middleton and the Dashwood ways of life. As in the first section, Elinor continues to act as the ideal against which Marianne's faults are gauged. However, Jane Austen begins to reorientate her attitude towards the two sisters during the Dashwoods' party with the result that the reader, who has had little difficulty before in understanding Elinor's criticisms of her sister, is left questioning the adequacy of her response to the brief skirmish between Marianne and Mrs. Ferrars. Although it is hard not to sympathise with Marianne's honest expression of disgust at

a situation in which all semblance of good humour, propriety and personal consideration has disappeared, Elinor is so concerned with maintaining at least an appearance of harmony that she is more hurt by her sister's anger than by the original offence. Colonel Brandon's attitude to Marianne's somewhat quixotic gesture is in many ways more appropriate than Elinor's:

Elinor was much more hurt by Marianne's warmth, than she had been by what produced it; but Colonel Brandon's eyes, as they were fixed on Marianne, declared that he noticed only what was amiable in it, the affectionate heart which could not bear to see a sister slighted in the smallest point. (236)

According to the strictest social criteria Elinor's evaluation of Marianne's behaviour is, of course, correct. To chastise the morally blind Mrs. Ferrars is futile and to do so in public is ill-mannered. Thus, Mr. Knightley does not criticise Mr. Elton for his rudeness to Harriet because he knows that it would serve no purpose, and he chastises Emma in private for her treatment of Miss Bates. However, there are disturbing signs here that the continual strain imposed on Elinor's social composure by the imperfect world in which she is forced to operate and by her sister's irresponsible behaviour has made her a little insensitive to the claims of the individual.

These hints are confirmed by the way in which Elinor attempts to conceal her feelings even after Edward's engagement to Lucy has become generally known. In describing her reaction to the situation she tries at first to be totally objective and unemotional:

"Yes. But I did not love only him;--and while the comfort of others was dear to me, I was glad to spare them from knowing how much I felt. Now, I can think and speak of it with little emotion. I would not have you suffer on my account; for I assure you I no longer suffer materially myself. I have many things to support me. I am not conscious of having provoked the disappointment by any imprudence of my own, and I have borne it as much as possible without spreading it farther. I acquit Edward of all essential misconduct. I wish him very happy; and I am so sure of his always doing his duty, that though now he may harbour some regret, in the end he must become so." (263)

It takes Marianne's angry comment that this kind of moderation implies a lack of real feeling to force Elinor to make a full statement of her suffering. Thus, for the first time, Marianne's response to a situation is clearly superior to her sister's since her strong assertion of the claims of the individual is needed before Elinor, for whom social composure has become, to some extent, a defensive reaction designed to dull rather than to conceal emotion, can reassert a balance between personal and social obligations.

Marianne also emerges from the next encounter with John Dashwood at least as well as Elinor. Indeed, her outspoken protestations of disbelief at Dashwood's silly comments about Edward's failure to reject Lucy in favour of Miss Morton are in many ways more admirable than the stoical silence maintained by Elinor. While it is possible to understand Elinor's realisation that opposition would serve no better purpose with John Dashwood than it would with Mrs. Ferrars, it is much easier to appreciate the value of Marianne's anger at his complaisant report of Mrs. Ferrars' attempts to coerce their friend away from his moral obligations.

From the events of the Dashwoods' party, and of these two scenes, which serve to bolster the impression conveyed there, it would appear that Jane Austen has modified her response to Elinor and Marianne radically, and that she has discovered a new preference for self-expression over the claims of propriety. However, a more accurate picture of the extent to which her emphasis has changed emerges if two other scenes are taken into account. In the first of these Jane Austen reasserts the value of Elinor's rather rigid concern with propriety by showing how she reacts to a painful encounter with the still secretly engaged Edward and Lucy. Although she is extremely upset by this sudden confrontation with the man whom she loves and his fiancée, Elinor is so concerned with honouring her promise to conceal her knowledge of the engagement, and with setting the embarrassed Edward at ease, that she suppresses all display of emotion and indulges in the usual banalities of polite intercourse:

But Elinor had more to do; and so anxious was she, for his sake and her own, to do it well, that she forced herself, after a moment's recollection, to welcome him, with a look and manner that were almost easy, and almost open; and another struggle, another effort still improved them. She would not allow the presence of Lucy, nor the consciousness of some injustice towards herself, to deter her from saying that she was happy to see him, and that she had very much regretted being from home, when he called before in Berkeley-street. (241)

Elinor's behaviour is clearly superior to that of either Edward, who is completely unable to control his embarrassment, Lucy, who "seemed determined to make no contribution to the comfort of the others, and would not say a word" (241), or Marianne, who makes well-intentioned, but extremely

inappropriate attempts to engage Edward in a tête-à-tête conversation with her sister. Thus, while Marianne's tendency to give ready expression to her feelings might make her a more sympathetic figure than Elinor when she is dealing with such obvious villains as Mrs. Ferrars or John Dashwood, it is totally unsuited to such a delicate situation as this.

Elinor similarly emerges with full credit from her next encounter with John Dashwood, during which she shows that in order to assert the self the individual need not step completely outside the bounds of propriety as Marianne tends to do even in her most sympathetic moments. Freed from the restrictions imposed on her by the presence of other company, Elinor quickly ceases trying to answer John Dashwood's ridiculous comments seriously, and allows herself the indulgence of several polite, but heavily ironic comments about the implications of Mrs. Ferrars' plans to marry Robert to Miss Morton:

"We think now"--said Mr. Dashwood, after a short pause, "of Robert's marrying Miss Morton."

Elinor, smiling at the grave and decisive importance of her brother's tone, calmly replied,

"The lady, I suppose, has no choice in the affair."

"Choice!--how do you mean?"--

"I only mean, that I suppose from your manner of speaking, it must be the same to Miss Morton whether she marry Edward or Robert."

"Certainly, there can be no difference; for Robert will now to all intents and purposes be considered as the eldest son;--and as to any thing else, they are both very agreeable young men, I do not know that one is superior to the other." (296-297)

What Jane Austen wishes to establish in these four episodes is that, by retaining her acute sense of the importance

of the self and by learning from Elinor who, for all her limitations, clearly still has much to teach about social obligations, Marianne is capable of achieving an even greater degree of maturity than her sister. Unless the significance of these scenes is grasped, the final round of marriages in which Marianne, and not Elinor, wins the great landed gentleman, Colonel Brandon, is deprived of much of its meaning. Jane Austen's statement of faith in the ability of her society to nurture and propagate an ideal of existence can achieve its greatest effect only if the two most worthy people in her fictional world are finally united.

It is fitting that Jane Austen should begin to reorientate her comparison of the sisters at this point because, with the revelation of Elinor's concealed anguish, Marianne is now in possession of all the pieces that are needed to make up the jigsaw of social understanding. Not only has she been exposed to many aspects of society but she has also been made to see that personal suffering does not excuse the individual from all responsibility to those around him. Unfortunately, despite her immediate sense of the superiority of Elinor's conduct and her honest self-recriminations, Marianne cannot fit the pieces together until after a final stupid romantic gesture has brought her near to death. As in her other novels, Jane Austen emphasises this significant moral development by changing the scene of her action from London to Cleveland.

Marianne's removal from London seems at first to have

done her more harm than good because it not only serves to recall her former hopes by completing her separation from Willoughby, but it also provides her with a new source of sorrow in taking her to Cleveland, which is close to Combe Magna. However, although the immediate effect of Cleveland is detrimental to Marianne's moral progress, in the larger view it is more important that it is eighty miles from Barton than that it is less than thirty from Willoughby's home. Once the disease of sensibility has been brought to its climax and purged by the resurgence, albeit a vicarious one, of Willoughby's influence, Marianne is able to return home emotionally cleansed and morally reborn.

While Cleveland itself has a fairly neutral role to play in the novel, all the conflicts that are crystallised there having developed elsewhere, the description of the house and its surroundings suggests that it is a suitable setting for the restoration of health:

Cleveland was a spacious, modern-built house, situated on a sloping lawn. It had no park, but the pleasure-grounds were tolerably extensive; and like every other place of the same degree of importance, it had its open shrubbery, and closer wood walk, a road of smooth gravel winding round a plantation, led to the front, the lawn was dotted over with timber, the house itself was under the guardianship of the fir, the mountain-ash, and the acacia, and a thick screen of them altogether, interspersed with tall Lombardy poplars, shut out the offices. (302)

Mr. Palmer rather surprisingly emerges as a man of sufficient authority and good manners to make this promising exterior meaningful:

She found him, however, perfectly the gentleman in his behaviour to all his visitors, and only occasionally rude to his wife and her mother; she found him very capable of being

a pleasant companion, and only prevented from being so always, by too great an aptitude to fancy himself as much superior to people in general, as he must feel himself to be to Mrs. Jennings and Charlotte. (304)

The context of the home seems to make Mr. Palmer, like Mrs. Jennings, much more alert to his social duties.

Marianne's critical illness is brought on when, no longer content simply to exclude herself from company, she begins to seek appropriate settings for the exercise of her sensibility. By deserting the dry gravel paths of the shrubbery for the more distant and wilder parts of the grounds, she gets her feet wet and contracts a putrid fever. However, in direct contrast to what happens on all earlier occasions, this excessive display of sensibility is instrumental in bringing Marianne to a better understanding of the nature of the world around her. Thus, whereas physical exclusion from the group during Mrs. Jennings' dinner party merely emphasised Marianne's general sense of alienation, it serves this time to tighten the bonds between herself and her society.

The truths at which Marianne is finally able to arrive after a long process of personal reassessment in the days after she begins to make her recovery are reaffirmed for the reader by the way in which each of the major characters reacts to her illness. The excellent personal qualities of the Palmers and Mrs. Jennings are particularly evident. Mr. Palmer is eager to stay and be of service until his wife's concern for the health of the baby compels him to leave the house, and Mrs. Jennings not only shows extreme

courage in remaining behind to nurse Marianne through what was often a deadly infection at this time,⁶ but for once also adds tact to kindness by halting Colonel Brandon's departure:

Here, however, the kindness of Mrs. Jennings interposed most acceptably; for to send the Colonel away while his love was in so much uneasiness on her sister's account, would be to deprive them both, she thought, of every comfort; and therefore telling him at once that his stay at Cleveland was necessary to herself, that she should want him to play at piquet of an evening, while Miss Dashwood was above with her sister, etc. she urged him so strongly to remain, that he, who was gratifying the first wish of his own heart by a compliance, could not long even effect to demur; especially as Mrs. Jennings's entreaty was warmly seconded by Mr. Palmer, who seemed to feel a relief to himself, in leaving behind him a person so well able to assist or advise Miss Dashwood in any emergence. (309)

The ever-attentive Colonel Brandon, who has previously helped Elinor and Edward Ferrars in moments of distress, eagerly seizes on the chance of at last being of service to his beloved Marianne and sets out to bring Mrs. Dashwood to her bedside. Elinor is acutely conscious of the value to be derived from sending a man of his worth on such a delicate mission:

The comfort of such a friend at the moment as Colonel Brandon --of such a companion for her mother,--how gratefully was it felt!--a companion whose judgment would guide, whose attendance must relieve, and whose friendship might sooth her!--as far as the shock of such a summons could be lessened to her, his presence, his manners, his assistance, would lessen it. (311-312)

Colonel Brandon's worth is further underlined when the news that Marianne is dying finally inspires Willoughby to travel to Cleveland and give Elinor a full explanation of his mercenary motives for deserting her sister. By closely juxtaposing scenes involving her two most important male

characters in order that Colonel Brandon's superiority might be re-emphasised, Jane Austen fully prepares the way for the marriage into which her hero is soon to enter with Marianne.

Marianne's sudden and comprehensive acquisition of self-knowledge after recovering from her illness surprises even Elinor. Thus, when Mrs. Dashwood argues that Marianne could never have been as happy with Willoughby as she might be with Colonel Brandon, Elinor is unable to agree with her because she has no reason to believe that her sister has been freed of her romantic aspirations. Yet, almost immediately afterwards she perceives a radical change in Marianne's conduct. Not only does she take her leave of Mrs. Jennings in a manner that implies respect and gratitude but she also faces up to the painful reminders of Willoughby to be found at Barton Cottage with resolution and firmness. Marianne soon explains that during her illness she came to a realisation of her obligations to others and implies an awareness of the moral discriminations that must be made between the Middleton and the John Dashwood groups:

"My illness has made me think--It has given me leisure and calmness for serious recollection. Long before I was enough recovered to talk, I was perfectly able to reflect. I considered the past; I saw in my own behaviour since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. My illness, I well knew, had been entirely brought on by myself, by such negligence of my own health, as I had felt even at the time to be wrong. Had I died,--it would have been self-destruction. I did not know my danger till the danger was removed; but with such feelings as these reflections gave me, I wonder at my recovery,--wonder that the very eagerness of my desire to live, to have time for atonement to my God, and to you all, did not kill me

at once. Had I died,--in what peculiar misery should I have left you, my nurse, my friend, my sister!--You, who had seen all the fretful selfishness of my latter days; who had known all the murmurings of my heart!--How should I have lived in your remembrance!--My mother too! How could you have consoled her!--I cannot express my own abhorrence of myself. Whenever I looked towards the past, I saw some duty neglected, or some failing indulged. Every body seemed injured by me. The kindness, the unceasing kindness of Mrs. Jennings, I had repaid with ungrateful contempt. To the Middletons, the Palmers, the Steeles, to every common acquaintance even, I had been insolent and unjust; with an heart hardened against their merits, and a temper irritated by their very attention. --To John, to Fanny,--yes, even to them, little as they deserve, I had given less than their due. But you,--you above all, above my mother, had been wronged by me." (345-346)

It now requires only Elinor's information that Willoughby did indeed return her love, and that her affection was thus not totally wasted, for Marianne to achieve complete peace of mind.

Startling though this change of outlook is, it is not an arbitrary one since the truths that Marianne finally learns are those which Elinor has tried to teach her all along. Jane Austen's point is that, in spite of any guidance that the individual might receive from those around him, he must finally solve the social jigsaw puzzle for himself. Thus, Marianne cannot learn what Elinor has to teach until she becomes independently aware of the limitations of approaching experience according to the demands of the creed of sensibility.

With Marianne's achievement of maturity the moral world of Sense and Sensibility becomes complete, and only the plot threads remain to be untangled. The appearance of Edward Ferrars heralds the news that he is at last free to marry Elinor, and that Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars have been

brought together by their characteristic vices, her greed and his vanity, into a justly ill-matched marriage. After gaining an economic competence as a result of a partial reconciliation with Mrs. Ferrars, brought about by Elinor's pragmatic awareness that marriage would be difficult without her approval and help, the couple remove to Delaford. They are soon joined by Marianne who, because of her new awareness of the moral significance of good manners and a polite concern for others, has inevitably learnt to love Colonel Brandon.

Marriage is the essential mark of Marianne's entry into the adult world, and it would have been a denial of her newly won maturity to have lived solely for her family as she originally planned to do. Although it would be difficult to argue that Jane Austen in any way develops a relationship between Colonel Brandon and Marianne, she has shown that they are, individually, the worthiest man and woman in their world, and that they are, thus, fully suited to each other. Whether involved in rescuing Elinor from Mrs. Jennings' embarrassing comments, giving a living to Edward, or bringing Mrs. Dashwood to her sick daughter, Brandon has revealed a consistent concern for others, while Marianne, by reconciling the claims of propriety with her keenly developed sense of the self, has become an even better balanced individual than her sister, Elinor. We must simply accept that Mrs. Dashwood's frequently contrived visits to Delaford fulfilled their purpose, and that Marianne learned to love Brandon as he loves her.

The novel's moral gradations are clearly defined at

the end. The Middletons continue their tedious, but harmless, round of social activities, willingly supported by Margaret Dashwood, now of an age for dancing; the John Dashwoods and the Robert Ferrars live together in London in a condition of great affluence but mutual ill-will; Willoughby finds a form of happiness by indulging in trivial pursuits; and the inhabitants of Delaford exist in a condition of perfect harmony, accepting the social claims of the outside world, but rising above it morally:

Between Barton and Delaford, there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate; --and among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands. (380)

Despite its many structural faults, Sense and Sensibility's statement of optimism is wrought out of a full examination of the world that is embodied in it. Thus, the comparatively harmless social flaws of the Middletons, Palmers and Mrs. Jennings and the rigidly economic code of the John Dashwoods, Mrs. Ferrars and Robert and the Steele sisters, have as much relevance to Marianne's final acceptance of the necessity to moderate her conduct and to respect the claims of others as her realisation of Willoughby's defects and Elinor and Colonel Brandon's unflagging demonstrations of correct behaviour. Moreover, as in Northanger Abbey, the frame of reference is broadened considerably in Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austen's adherence to the tripartite structure of ritual. Although Marianne does not become

totally separated from the home environment until almost a third of the way through the action, she is, nevertheless, subjected to moral tests not only during her extended visit to London, but also upon every occasion that she leaves Barton Cottage and attends formal social occasions at Barton Park. Unlike Catherine, who, in spite of the final dramatic leap into maturity that she is called upon to make, learns gradually of the ways of the adult world throughout her experiences in Bath and at Northanger Abbey, Marianne remains blind to the significance of the lessons to be learned within the context of the formal social occasion until she is brought to self-awareness by the crucial moment of epiphany that she experiences at Cleveland. However, both heroines, in their different ways, do progress successfully through the ritual of initiation and establish ideal relationships between themselves and the world around. Just as Catherine Morland wins her Henry Tilney by passing through intermediary functions until she eliminates the condition of lack that is imposed on her by her excessive benevolence, so Marianne Dashwood frees herself from the destructive influence of the creed of sensibility as a result of her experience in a number of testing situations and becomes worthy of Colonel Brandon. Thus, Sense and Sensibility is concluded as appropriately by the optimistic statement that "though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they [Elinor and Marianne], could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands" (380)

as was Northanger Abbey by the comment that Henry and Catherine achieved "perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen" (252).

While Sense and Sensibility is, in many ways, a rather less successful artistic creation than Northanger Abbey, it must also be considered an organic part of Jane Austen's mature achievement because, like the earlier novel, it reveals an awareness of the implications of pursuing the theme of initiation and, albeit rather spasmodically, of the thematic importance and the structural possibilities of the formal social occasion.

CHAPTER IV

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Pride and Prejudice is structurally so superior to Jane Austen's two earlier novels that critics have frequently taken recourse to concrete metaphors in order to define its peculiar quality. Mary Lascelles describes the movement of the two lovers, who are pulled apart until they reach a climax of mutual hostility and thereafter bend their course towards mutual understanding and amity, in terms of two diverging and converging lines,¹ while Langdon Elsbree defines the early stages of Elizabeth's relationship with Darcy as "a dance pattern of movement towards, movement away from, movement towards, movement away from."² Elsbree's dance image is particularly appropriate and can be extended to embrace the whole of the novel since the fluctuating relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy is reminiscent of the movements of the Longways Country Dance. In this dance, as P.J.S. Richardson describes it,³ two parallel lines were formed, the men in one and the ladies in the other, and by the end of each figure the leading couple passed down the line one place, the end of the dance coming when they had reached the bottom and returned to the top again, each of the couples having taken the lead in turn. When the number of couples was small the "Whole Set" could be treated as one entity, but when there was a

considerable number of couples the dancers were divided into "Minor Sets" of two or three couples. Sometimes all couples were dancing at once, and on other occasions a number had to "stand easy." During the dancing of the various figures there was a considerable changing of partners, as in the square dance today. Thus, the dance is a miniscule of the world of social relationships, of pairing and parting, of acting and observing, of striving to the top and moving to the bottom. Although Darcy and Elizabeth are parted as Wickham and Collins briefly become Elizabeth's partners, occasionally stand aside as Bingley and Jane take their turn at dancing, and are even completely separated at the bottom of the dance by her refusal of his marriage proposal and his subsequent departure for Pemberley, it is inevitable that they will eventually return to the top and complete the dance together.

The formal social occasion provides the basis for this aesthetically satisfying structure. Not only is there a fuller and more subtle use of the individual scene than in Northanger Abbey or Sense and Sensibility, but episodes are also combined in such a way as to give a patterned effect to the novel as a whole. Indeed, so closely allied are form and content in Pride and Prejudice that each of the novel's three stages is developed in terms of an appropriate social ritual. The first phase, during which Darcy and Elizabeth are faced with the problem of finding correct partners, is organised around three dances and a visit that is climaxed by a dance; the second resolves the mutual misunderstanding about the value of each other's social class by taking Elizabeth on

visits to the aristocratic worlds of Rosings and Pemberley; while the third, in which harmony is restored, is concerned with marriage.

It is in keeping with the general pattern of movement suggested by the dance and marriage metaphors that, although both Darcy and Elizabeth are required to make considerable readjustments before they can finally be united, the male should take the initiative throughout their relationship. Thus, the story of Pride and Prejudice is, in concrete terms, the story of how Darcy, after many attempts, learns to approach Elizabeth correctly, and how Elizabeth, after rejecting him many times, learns to accept Darcy. The first section reaches its climax when Elizabeth, after refusing Darcy twice, admits a somewhat unwilling interest in him by accepting his third offer to dance; the second when she accepts his invitation to dine at Pemberley and thus gives concrete recognition to the resolution of the social conflicts that had induced her to reject all of his approaches, including an offer of marriage, during the visit to Rosings; and the third, when she accepts his renewed marriage proposal and thus brings the novel to its conclusion. This pervasive patterning makes it possible, as Elsbree's dance metaphor suggests, to view the novel as one highly organised and delicately composed social ritual.

As well as perfecting her form in Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen achieved a much surer grasp on her subject. Instead of dissipating her effects by defining her heroines

in relation to both the literary standards espoused by the Gothic novel or the novel of sensibility and to the values operating in their particular social milieus, as she does with Catherine Morland and Marianne Dashwood, Jane Austen treats Elizabeth entirely as a social being. With the exception of a brief period of disillusion during which she is attracted to the escapist aspects of Romanticism, Elizabeth always relates herself and her actions to the immediate world around her. Indeed, her concern with direct experience is implicitly contrasted on several occasions with Mary's stale literary judgements on life. This sharpening of focus is reflected throughout the novel with the result that there is none of the vagueness about the exact social position of some of the characters that, in Sense and Sensibility, often prevents the reader from making any but the most hypothetical connections between behaviour and rank.⁴ Sir William Lucas, for example, acquires dimensions denied to Sir John Middleton, whose background is never defined precisely, because his faults are always directly linked with the rapidity of his rise through the social ranks.

By limiting her area of concern in this way Jane Austen is able to extend her social scope and thus to show that, while her moral ideal of existence has been firmly embodied in the gentry in her two earlier novels, it is also shared by the aristocracy and the middle class.⁵ Her thesis, which is based, as Kliger points out, upon the concept of Ordo, whereby the distinction of ranks depends entirely upon

difference of function and in no way implies moral superiority,⁶ is developed dramatically through the relationship of Darcy and Elizabeth. Whereas Catherine and Marianne become worthy of Henry Tilney and Colonel Brandon by making a relatively simple development from adolescence to adulthood, both Elizabeth and Darcy are fully cognisant of the values of their own groups ^rthroughout their acquaintance but, before they can achieve mutual understanding and respect and finally be united in marriage, each has to learn that these values are shared by the other's class. Elizabeth is thus equipped to deal with members of the gentry, the group to which she belongs herself, and with people of middle class status, whose worth she recognises ^rthrough the behaviour of her relatives, the Gardiners; but, having little knowledge of the aristocracy, she tends to accept the stereotyped view that the class as a whole is supercilious and worthless, especially as it is supported by Darcy's conduct during their first encounter at the Meryton ball. Even when Darcy behaves more responsibly later, Elizabeth prefers to accuse him of hypocrisy rather than to question the adequacy of her original judgement. Elizabeth's adherence to the stereotyped view that Darcy is a typical aristocratic snob derives not only from her ignorance of his social background but also from an unconscious emotional need to suppress the uncomfortable sense of attraction that she feels toward a man whom, according to all rational considerations, she ought to find thoroughly objectionable. In normal circumstances Elizabeth would be socially obligated to

respond politely to Darcy's formal attempts to engage her in dancing or conversation, and would thus be repeatedly drawn into close proximity with a man who has the power to disturb her emotional equilibrium seriously. However, by accepting that Darcy derives from a world completely alien to her own, Elizabeth feels justified not only in rejecting his every approach, but also in doing so in an extremely hostile manner designed to preclude any further attempts at establishing communication. If her response to Darcy is compared with the way in which she behaves in Lady Catherine de Bourgh's company, it becomes clear that, in this one aspect, the artificial barriers erected by Elizabeth serve simply as a convenient means of reconciling her emotionally inspired behaviour with the demands of correct conduct. Thus, although Lady Catherine represents all that she dislikes in the aristocracy, Elizabeth feels no compulsion during her visit to Rosings to express her disapproval by behaving uncivilly.

Darcy also operates excellently in his own sphere and understands the worth of gentlemen like Bingley, but completely underrates the claims of the middle class and of declining families of genteel origin like the Bennets, whom he obviously believes have compromised their respectability by marrying beneath them. While Darcy does not long remain blind to Elizabeth's worth, despite her social position, and is quite justified in his poor opinion of Mrs. Bennet, Lydia and Mary, he is guilty of judging the lesser gentry and the middle class as a whole according to a priori criteria. Thus,

he accepts Mrs. Bennet as being typical of her class because she confirms his original stereotype and tries to isolate the admirable Elizabeth from the background of which she is properly a part.

The inadequacy of Darcy's manner of judging the ranks below his own can be shown quite clearly if the social claims of the Bingleys, whom he thinks are worthy of his friendship and esteem, are compared to those of the Bennets, whom he despises. Despite their great wealth and the fashionable manners of Louisa and Caroline, the Bingleys are a relatively new family lacking as yet one of the essential qualifications of the gentleman, ownership of land:

They [Louisa and Caroline] were of a respectable family in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade.

Mr. Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly an hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it.-- Mr. Bingley intended it likewise, and sometimes made choice of his county; but as he was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of his temper, whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase. (15)

Bingley's inability to settle decisively in either the country or the town is symptomatic of this lack of fixed social rank:

"When I am in the country," he replied, "I never wish to leave it; and when I am in town it is pretty much the same. They have each their advantages, and I can be equally happy in either." (43)

Even more important, instead of cultivating the gentlemanly virtues that can lend respectability to its wealth, the family is engaged in a rather frenetic and extremely improper attempt to leap straight from the bourgeois to the aristocratic

worlds. Bingley's expressed desire to buy Pemberley thus carries with it more than a hint of seriousness:

"But I would really advise you to make your purchase in that neighbourhood, and take Pemberley for a kind of model. There is not a finer county in England than Derbyshire."

"With all my heart; I will buy Pemberley itself if Darcy will sell it." (38)

The Bennets, on the other hand, are a long established family in possession of an estate, albeit entailed, of £2,000 a year. Moreover, although their respectability is threatened continually by the behaviour of Mrs. Bennet and her three youngest daughters, Mr. Bennet, Elizabeth and Jane are all acutely aware of the duties of the gentleman and, in their different ways, try to fulfill them.

Darcy's inability to understand the relative worth of the two families manifests itself most obviously in his attempts to affect a separation between Bingley and Jane because of the latter's supposed social inferiority. Yet, in reality, there is much to be gained on both sides by a match between a rising man of fortune and the daughter of a rather faded gentleman. The ease with which the couple comes together at the Meryton ball emphasises that they are ideally matched socially as well as personally. For once Mrs. Bennet's eagerness to magnify the importance of the slightest hint of marital interest is justified:

"Every body said how well she looked; and Mr. Bingley thought her quite beautiful, and danced with her twice. Only think of that my dear; he actually danced with her twice; and she was the only creature in the room that he asked a second time." (12-13)

Jane Austen thus places her two lovers in an extremely

ironic and apparently hopeless situation. Each is a worthy member of his own class, but each has a prejudiced view of the value of the other's. Because of this Darcy is unnecessarily supercilious in his response, first of all to the whole Bennet family, and later to the whole family with the exception of Elizabeth, while she refuses to recognise his better qualities and, inspired by an emotional need to reject his advances, often uses her prejudice against his class as an excuse for denying him the usual courtesies of social intercourse.

Although Darcy and Elizabeth become increasingly attracted to one another, albeit almost unconsciously in her case, they cannot form a meaningful union until each learns to accept that the other's worth is inextricably bound up with his background. Thus, only with resolution at a social level can the accelerating circle of personal misunderstanding be broken. Because they are separated by such a complex web of mutual misunderstanding the process of education is a long and frustrating one for both hero and heroine in Pride and Prejudice. However, implicit in the resolution of the conflict between Darcy and Elizabeth is a particularly optimistic statement of faith in the moral health, not simply of Jane Austen's own social group, but of the whole of society.

In the first section of Pride and Prejudice Elizabeth and Darcy become increasingly attracted to one another at a personal level but fail completely to resolve their social antagonisms. Thus, despite several attempts on Darcy's part to establish communication, it is inevitable that the couple should remain rigidly apart. The progress of the frustrating relationship thus produced can be charted around four dances. At the first, Darcy is so acutely conscious of Elizabeth's supposed social inferiority that he rudely rejects Bingley's proposal

that he dance with her. However, he gradually becomes so attracted to Elizabeth, first of all by her pleasing appearance and then by more solid proof of her worth that, during the second and third dances, he overcomes his continuing social objections and asks her, once literally and once hypothetically, to be his partner. Each time, Elizabeth, who, consciously at least, is still able to equate personal and social dislike, refuses him. It is not until the Netherfield ball, which brings the novel's first movement to its conclusion, that Darcy is finally accepted. This acceptance marks a mutual recognition of attraction but in no way closes the social gap. Elizabeth, indeed, makes use of the occasion to hint at her very strong objections to Darcy, and the couple part angrily at the end of the dance. By structuring her action in this way, Jane Austen not only manages to produce an aesthetically pleasing, dance-like pattern of movement in which Darcy repeatedly advances towards and retreats from Elizabeth, but she also contrives to give full emphasis to the most important stages in the development of her lovers' rather complicated relationship.

Despite his noble appearance and the rumour that he has a fortune of £10,000 a year, Darcy's arrogant behaviour at the Meryton ball earns him the justifiable disapproval of almost the whole of Meryton society. Brought into this social milieu only by his friendship for Bingley, Darcy refuses to accept that it can claim even the minimum of good manners from him and restricts himself to the company of the

Bingleys and the Hursts throughout the evening. When forced temporarily to sit next to Mrs. Long, who "does not keep a carriage, and had come to the ball in a hack chaise" (19), Darcy fails to indulge in any of the expected social pleasantries, but, rather, maintains an extremely offensive silence. The manner in which he rejects Bingley's attempt to make him extend his sphere of concern by dancing with Elizabeth is even more obviously rude:

"Which do you mean?" and turning round, he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men." (11-12)

Although Darcy tries to explain away his aversion to Elizabeth by commenting on the deficiencies of her personal appearance, his objection is, as his behaviour towards the rest of the company reveals, a social one.

The implicit connection established during the ball between his conduct and his social position is made absolutely clear to Elizabeth during a later conversation with Charlotte Lucas and her brother. Enamoured as they are of the aristocracy, both argue that Darcy's excessive demonstration of pride is justified by his position in life. Thus, Charlotte says,

"His pride . . . does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, every thing in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud." (20)

Her brother not only continues in the same vein but also adds several details to the stereotyped view of the aristocracy upon which his own and his sister's comments are based:

"If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy," cried a young Lucas who came with his sisters, "I should not care how proud I was. I would keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day." (20)

These analyses, if not the conclusions that are drawn from them, are justified in so far as Darcy's response to the lesser gentry and the middle class is concerned, since he has obviously inherited something of the feudal view of aristocratic superiority. However, neither the Lucases nor, as it soon becomes apparent, Elizabeth, are justified in extending this single analogy to embrace all aspects of the man. Young Lucas's assumption that Darcy is the stock-figure of the hard-drinking, hunting nobleman and Elizabeth's alternative stereotype of the worthless and snobbish aristocrat are thus equally inadequate and unfair. It must, however, be said in Elizabeth's defence that as soon as she is able to view Darcy within the context of his proper environment at Pemberley, she immediately appreciates not only that he is in most ways a worthy and admirable man, but also that her opinion of his class as a whole was inaccurate. Darcy, on the other hand, refuses to reconsider his attitude to Elizabeth's social group even after he has been fully exposed to it and it has become apparent from her behaviour, and from that of Jane and to some extent Mr. Bennet, that all members of it cannot be fitted into his stereotype.

The inadequacy of Darcy's initial view of Elizabeth, distorted as it is by his prejudice against her social class, becomes obvious even before they are properly acquainted. Brought unwillingly into her company by Bingley's eagerness

to further his acquaintance with Jane, Darcy is forced to admit that her manners and appearance are considerably more attractive than he had supposed:

Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. (23)

Rather more concrete evidence of Elizabeth's real charm and worth is provided by her conduct at Sir William Lucas's party, during which she not only rebukes Darcy in an attractively self-assertive manner for eavesdropping on her conversation with Charlotte, but also demonstrates a concern for others by modestly relinquishing her place at the piano, after playing well but not perfectly, rather than tax the interest of her audience. The value of this latter action is emphasised when her accomplished, but tasteless, sister, Mary, succeeds her and proceeds to embellish an over-long performance with "a pedantic air and a conceited manner" (25). Darcy is so impressed that he begins to discriminate between Elizabeth and her world. Although scornful of the dancing in general, which he describes as a suitable pursuit for savages, he proves quite willing to acquiesce to Sir William Lucas's rather pretentious proposal that he engage himself with Elizabeth. However, Elizabeth has been given no reason to

alter her initial bad impression of Darcy and, still smarting from his earlier insult, rejects the offer:

"Mr. Darcy, you must allow me to present this young lady to you as a very desirable partner.--You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure, when so much beauty is before you." And taking her hand, he would have given it to Mr. Darcy, who, though extremely surprised, was not unwilling to receive it, when she instantly drew back, and said with some discomposure to Sir William,

"Indeed, Sir, I have not the least intention of dancing.--I entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg for a partner."

Mr. Darcy with grave propriety requested to be allowed the honour of her hand; but in vain. (26)

Despite this refusal Darcy derives so much pleasure from thinking of Elizabeth that the toadying Miss Bingley is for once unable to gauge his response to the proceedings as a whole:

"I can guess the subject of your reverie."

"I should imagine not."

"You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner--in such society; and indeed I am quite of your opinion. I was never more annoyed! The insipidity and yet the noise; the nothingness and yet the self-importance of all these people!--What would I give to hear your strictures on them!"

"Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you. My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow." (27)

However, Darcy, as yet, has only proceeded to the stage of excusing the group for the attractive, but rather superficial, qualities revealed by one of its members. Thus, his conversation with Sir William Lucas earlier in the evening is characterised by the same bad-tempered and impatient sense of superiority that marked his attitude to the whole of Meryton society, including Elizabeth, during the Meryton ball:

Sir William only smiled. "Your friend performs delightfully;" he continued after a pause, on seeing Bingley join the group;--"and I doubt not that you are an adept in the science yourself, Mr. Darcy."

"You saw me dance at Meryton, I believe, Sir."

"Yes, indeed, and received no inconsiderable pleasure from the sight. Do you often dance at St. James's?"

"Never, sir."

"Do you not think it would be a proper compliment to the place?"

"It is a compliment which I never pay to any place if I can avoid it."

"You have a house in town, I conclude?"

Mr. Darcy bowed.

"I had once some thoughts of fixing in town myself--for I am fond of superior society; but I did not feel quite certain that the air of London would agree with Lady Lucas."

He paused in hopes of an answer; but his companion was not disposed to make any. (25-26)

It is not until Darcy learns to modify his attitude towards Elizabeth's world as a whole and to understand that the usual external marks of respect are to be extended to everyone, regardless of class or personal limitations, that the pattern of approach and rejection introduced in this scene can be broken.

The conflicts and the pattern of movement suggested in the opening pages of Pride and Prejudice become increasingly obvious in the course of Elizabeth's prolonged encounters with Darcy during her visit to Netherfield. The more Darcy sees of Elizabeth the more conscious he becomes of her worth. However, partly because of a very genuine awareness that implicit in his arrogant response to her mother is a continued sense of superiority towards her class, and partly because she is blinded by her own prejudices to his better qualities, Elizabeth continues to reject Darcy's every approach. The relationship of the two lovers during the

visit to Netherfield is thus epitomised by Darcy's second, albeit purely hypothetical, invitation to dance, which is again refused.

Although Jane Austen in no way modifies her critical response towards Darcy in this part of her novel, she does begin to place rather more emphasis on the limitations imposed on Elizabeth's approach to experience by her stereotyped view of Darcy and his class. Thus, just as Darcy behaves responsibly towards the Bingleys and herself, but not towards Mrs. Bennet, so Elizabeth responds excellently to everyone but him. While Elizabeth is skilled enough in the intricacies of social intercourse to avoid being openly offensive and while, as she later claims herself, it is possible that the essentially good-natured Darcy finds her aggressive attitude attractive, her response to him is inexcusable.⁷ By manipulating polite conversation to her own ends, an error into which she never lapses elsewhere, even when dealing with the objectionable and silly Mr. Collins, Elizabeth is guilty of denying Darcy the basic respect implicit in the sincere observance of good manners.⁸ It becomes clear from the number of times that she comments on Darcy's "abominable pride" (81), snobbishness and vanity, traits which she obviously considers to be typically aristocratic, that Elizabeth feels justified in behaving in this way because she believes that he derives from an alien world in which manners have lost their moral significance. In reality, of course, her antagonistic response to Darcy derives from a need to suppress a latent sense of attraction

towards a man whom, consciously, she dislikes. Besides demonstrating her scorn for Darcy at every opportunity, Elizabeth wilfully misinterprets his behaviour on several occasions in order that he remain consistent with the abstract conception that she has of him.

The extremely frustrating situation in which Jane Austen has placed her two lovers is emphasised during each of the four main group encounters between them at Netherfield. Thus, on each occasion, Darcy demonstrates an increasing interest in Elizabeth but three times counteracts this by exhibiting the sense of scorn for her background that justifies much of the aversion that she feels for him. Similarly, Elizabeth displays the kind of worth on three occasions that makes a mockery of Darcy's stereotyped view of her social class but is always hostilely defensive in her encounters with Darcy and extremely perverse in her judgements of him. Thus, the more often Darcy and Elizabeth are brought into contact the more impregnable seems the wall of incomprehension separating them and, consequently, when they part at the end of the visit they are no nearer to reconciliation and mutual understanding than they were at the beginning.

Darcy first expresses his continuing bad opinion of the Bennets and their middle-class relatives during the after-dinner conversation on the day of Elizabeth's arrival at Netherfield. In response to Bingley, who tries to defend Jane and Elizabeth from Caroline and Mrs. Hurst's attack on their low connections by commenting generously, "If they had

uncles enough to fill all Cheapside . . . it would not make them one jot less agreeable," Darcy declares, "But it must very materially lessen their chances of marrying men of any consideration in the world" (37). The inadequacy of his sweeping assumption that the worth of the individual can be gauged entirely by his social connections is underlined by the manner in which Elizabeth behaves after entering the room. Faced with the jibes of Miss Bingley, who derides her for reading instead of joining the rest of the party in a game of cards, Elizabeth reacts politely to the implicit charge that she is too snobbish to indulge in trivial pursuits, but refuses to be coerced into leaving her chosen occupation:

"Do you prefer reading to cards?" said he [Mr Hurst]; "that is rather singular."

"Miss Eliza Bennet," said Miss Bingley, "despises cards. She is a great reader and has no pleasure in any thing else."

"I deserve neither such praise nor such censure," cried Elizabeth; "I am not a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things."

"In nursing your sister I am sure you have pleasure," said Bingley; "and I hope it will soon be increased by seeing her quite well."

Elizabeth thanked him from her heart, and then walked towards a table where a few books were lying. (37)

Darcy clearly finds Elizabeth's conduct attractive and when the conversation turns to the subject of feminine accomplishments he manages to pay her a polite compliment by stating a preference for a woman who not only possesses all the usual skills and talents, but also adds "something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (39). Granted her awareness of Darcy's attitude to her family,

Elizabeth is fully justified in responding negatively to this attempt at establishing communication. However, the manner in which she does so is indefensible because she does not merely refuse to accept the compliment but maliciously twists the emphasis both of his particular comment to herself and of his intelligent general statements so as to imply that he is a snob. She thus engages Darcy in the following repartee about feminine accomplishments:

"I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing any."

"Are you so severe upon your own sex, as to doubt the possibility of all this?"

"I never saw such a woman. I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united." (39-40)

While she is able to buttress her rather shaky aversion to Darcy by such tactics, Elizabeth not only comes near to lapsing into outright rudeness and thus bringing herself into disrepute, but also manages to miss very obvious signs that he might eventually emerge as a man worthy of the affections that she is so concerned to suppress.

The events of the next day, which culminate in Elizabeth's refusal of Darcy's invitation to dance, follow the same pattern of mutual incomprehension and of advance and rejection. Darcy's aversion to Elizabeth's family is made particularly apparent by his reaction to Mrs. Bennet when she pays a morning visit to enquire about Jane's health. Although the manner in which she interrupts his conversation with Bingley, by trying to refute his claim that country life is too unvaried to offer many opportunities for the

study of character types, is both rude and stupid, nevertheless Darcy cannot be excused for relinquishing all of his polite obligations by turning away scornfully and ignoring her:

"Yes, indeed," cried Mrs. Bennet, offended by his manner of mentioning a country neighbourhood. "I assure you there is quite as much of that going on in the country as in town."

Every body was surprised; and Darcy, after looking at her for a moment, turned silently away. (43)

The inconsistencies inherent in his position are underlined during the conversation in which he and Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst engage after Mrs. Bennet's departure. While he is willing to join them in attacking the Bennet family as a whole, Darcy tries to exempt Elizabeth from their criticism:

Mrs. Bennet and her daughters then departed, and Elizabeth returned instantly to Jane, leaving her own and her relations' behaviour to the remarks of the two ladies and Mr. Darcy; the latter of whom, however, could not be prevailed on to join in their censure of her, in spite of all Miss Bingley's witticisms on fine eyes. (46)

Yet, so long as he continues to insult Mrs. Bennet who, despite her personal faults, deserves respect for her station in life, he is indirectly insulting Elizabeth because she is a member of the same family and the same social class.

In view of Darcy's behaviour in the morning, it is hardly surprising that Elizabeth should continue to display an aversion to him in the evening. Yet, the manner in which she distorts his justified criticisms of Bingley's rashness into a statement of preference for sterile propriety over the claims of friendship, and thus once again imposes her own stereotype on him, goes beyond all acceptable standards of

behaviour:

". . . and if, as you were mounting your horse, a friend were to say, 'Bingley, you had better stay till next week,' you would probably do it, you would probably not go--and, at another word, might stay a month."

"You have only proved by this," cried Elizabeth, "that Mr. Bingley did not do justice to his own disposition. You have shewn him off now much more than he did himself."

"I am exceedingly gratified," said Bingley, "by your converting what my friend says into a compliment on the sweetness of my temper. But I am afraid you are giving it a turn which that gentleman did by no means intend; for he would certainly think the better of me, if under such a circumstance I were to give a flat denial, and ride off as fast as I could."

"Would Mr. Darcy then consider the rashness of your original intention as atoned for by your obstinacy in adhering to it?"

"Upon my word I cannot exactly explain the matter, Darcy must speak for himself."

"You expect me to account for opinions which you chuse to call mine, but which I have never acknowledged. Allowing the case, however, to stand according to your representation, you must remember, Miss Bennet, that the friend who is supposed to desire his return to the house, and the delay of his plan, has merely desired it, asked it without offering one argument in favour of its propriety."

"To yield readily--easily--to the persuasion of a friend is no merit with you."

"To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either."

"You appear to me, Mr. Darcy, to allow nothing for the influence of friendship and affection." (49-50)

Besides being guilty of blatant logic-chopping, Elizabeth behaves extremely improperly by being so critical of a man whom she scarcely knows.

Elizabeth is even more unjust when Darcy, who cannot help but have been impressed by the contrast between the way in which she quietly engages herself in needlework and Caroline Bingley's silly and flirtatious behaviour, gives concrete expression to his increasing regard by suggesting that it would be pleasurable to dance. Not content merely to disagree with him, she implies yet again that he is a snob:

"Do not you feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?"

She smiled, but made no answer. He repeated the question, with some surprise at her silence.

"Oh!" said she, "I heard you before; but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say 'Yes,' that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt." (52)

The pattern of interaction established in the first two scenes is repeated succinctly in the third. Walking in the shrubbery the next day with Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, Darcy is once more regaled with a series of rude comments about the Bennets and their relatives, but protests only about the inclusion of Elizabeth in the family group. When they encounter Elizabeth, Darcy invites her to join the party, but she wants none of his attentions and sends the three of them off together with the words,

"No, no; stay where you are.--You are charmingly group'd, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth." (53)

By framing Darcy with the snobbish Caroline and Louisa, Elizabeth contrives, as usual, to refuse him in a subtly insulting manner.

The visit to Netherfield is brought to its conclusion by another after-dinner scene set in the drawing room. As before, Elizabeth's behaviour compares extremely favourably with Caroline Bingley's, for while the former engages herself in quiet conversation with Bingley, the latter makes blatantly obvious attempts to ingratiate herself to Darcy. Yet immediately Darcy approaches her, the standard of Elizabeth's conduct degenerates. Enticed into what begins as a mockingly friendly conversation Elizabeth quickly finds opportunities

to accuse Darcy of humourlessness, vanity and pride, the qualities that she feels are typical of the aristocrat.

By repeating the same situation on four different occasions Jane Austen fully emphasises the apparent hopelessness of Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship, hindered as it is by such a complex of mutual misunderstandings. The implication to be drawn from the way in which the visit to Netherfield is structured is that until both Darcy and Elizabeth learn to realise the limitations of their stereotyped attitudes to one another's class, the same frustrating sequence of approach and rejection could be repeated ad infinitum.

Although it is by direct exposure to Darcy within the context of his home environment that Elizabeth finally achieves enlightenment, her first encounter with the Pemberley world serves ironically to widen rather than to narrow the gap between them. Thus, when Wickham, the son of old Mr. Darcy's steward, regales her with an account of how he was deprived of a career as a clergyman by Darcy, she rather naïvely accepts his story because it seems to confirm her original stereotype. Were Elizabeth not so obsessively concerned with ratifying the version of Darcy that she feels exempts her from being polite to him it is unlikely that she would put such blind faith in the word of a man whom she has little reason to trust. While the full extent of Wickham's depravity does not become apparent until much later, even at Aunt Philips's dinner party he shows himself to be a somewhat trivial person concerned only with good company:

"Society, I own, is necessary to me. I have been a disappointed man, and my spirits will not bear solitude. I must have employment and society." (79)

Another rather more subtle clue to Wickham's true character is given when he chooses to play lottery tickets, a symbol of the game of chance that constitutes his life, rather than whist.

The main issues raised during the novel's first movement are summed up at the Netherfield ball during which, despite her conscious aversion, Elizabeth is inexorably drawn towards Darcy before over-vigorously repulsing him. Prevented from furthering her acquaintance with the attractive Wickham by his surprising absence, and relieved to escape the wife-hunting Collins after enduring the first two "dances of mortification" (90) with him, Elizabeth finds herself almost unwittingly accepting Darcy's invitation to dance. Having at last committed herself to Darcy, Elizabeth does her best to deny the significance of this gambit in the courtship game by ridiculing the surface formalities of the dance ritual:

"It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy.--I talked about the dance, and you ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples." (91)

In contrast to Henry Tilney, who makes similar comments to Catherine Morland during the ball in the Lower Rooms, Elizabeth's intention is not merely to mock lightly at the demands of polite form, but to deprive Darcy's gesture of communication of all its meaning. Yet, in areas of her experience less charged with emotion, Elizabeth is acutely conscious of the importance to be attached to the minutiae

of social intercourse. When Collins, for example, engages her for the important first two dances, Elizabeth quickly realises the marital intentions underlying his invitation:

She had fully proposed being engaged by Wickham for those very dances:--and to have Mr. Collins instead! her liveliness had been never worse timed. . . . She was not the better pleased with his gallantry, from the idea it suggested of something more.--It now first struck her, that she was selected from among her sisters as worthy of being the mistress of Hunsford Parsonage, and of assisting to form a quadrille table at Rosings, in the absence of more eligible visitors. (87-88)

Elizabeth's behaviour does not improve as she and Darcy move down the set and, after hinting strongly at their incompatibility by saying "I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings" (93), she successfully repulses him by unnecessarily, and thus rudely, hinting at her knowledge of his mistreatment of Wickham. Once again, the excessively virulent manner in which Elizabeth reacts to Darcy cannot be adequately explained by her awareness of his snobbish attitude to her family and her class. Later, for example, even though she has much better reasons to despise him, she manages to convey to Wickham that she is now aware of the truth of his relationship with Darcy in a tactful and good-humoured manner designed to save him from any embarrassment. Her behaviour towards Darcy is thus clearly motivated by a need to avoid an unwelcome, but disturbingly attractive, emotional involvement.

Having driven Darcy away so abruptly, it becomes particularly imperative to Elizabeth throughout the rest of the evening that her stereotyped view of him not be contradicted. Thus, even though both Miss Bingley and Jane try to convince her that Darcy's behaviour towards Wickham has always been impeccable, Elizabeth clings determinedly to her

own version of the affair. Were she to accept their account she would, of course, be deprived of one of the main justifications for her own conduct which, in this last encounter, has become almost openly rude. Similarly, although she is ashamed that Darcy should see the lack of propriety that characterises the conduct of her own family during the evening, Elizabeth refuses to admit to herself that his disapproval could be caused by anything but aristocratic snobbery:

That his two sisters and Mr. Darcy, however, should have such an opportunity of ridiculing her relations was bad enough, and she could not determine whether the silent contempt of the gentleman, or the insolent smiles of the ladies, were more intolerable. (102)

Her evaluation of the Bingley sisters' attitude is probably accurate because, as we saw during the visit to Netherfield, their bourgeois vulgarity is still extremely evident despite the external graces that they have acquired, but she is extremely unjust to Darcy. Even during Mrs. Bennet's display of gross conduct at supper his expression is described as changing from "indignant contempt to a composed and steady gravity," and it remains "impenetrably grave" (100) during Mary's pretentious piano recital.⁹ Because of her oversimplified view of the man Elizabeth fails to realise that, while Darcy's generalisations about her class are snobbish and totally unjustified, his response to particular pieces of misconduct is based on moral criteria very similar to her own. Thus, when he later clarifies his position to Elizabeth, Darcy explains that he objected not only to her low connections, but also to "that total want of propriety so

frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by [Mrs. Bennet], by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father" (198).

The various elements which have combined to produce the impasse at which Elizabeth's relationship with Darcy has arrived are juxtaposed in the tableau that ends the scene. Only Bingley and Jane are exempted from the general sense of disharmony and dissatisfaction:

They [Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst] repulsed every attempt of Mrs. Bennet at conversation, and by so doing, threw a languor over the whole party, which was very little relieved by the long speeches of Mr. Collins, who was complimenting Mr. Bingley and his sisters on the elegance of their entertainment, and the hospitality and politeness which had marked their behaviour to their guests. Darcy said nothing at all. Mr. Bennet, in equal silence, was enjoying the scene. Mr. Bingley and Jane were standing together, a little detached from the rest, and talked only to each other. Elizabeth preserved as steady a silence as either Mrs. Hurst or Miss Bingley; and even Lydia was too much fatigued to utter more than the occasional exclamation of "Lord, how tired I am!" accompanied by a violent yawn. (102-103)

From this point on the dance motif disappears from the novel, significant actions now revolving around visits. The reason for this change would seem to be that the feelings of Elizabeth and Darcy are henceforth directed almost solely at each other. It is, thus, during the visit to Rosings that Darcy proposes to Elizabeth for the first time and makes her fully aware of his love. Despite her angry rejection Elizabeth is forced to consider her own feelings seriously and the rest of the novel is devoted to the resolution of her social conflicts with Darcy. Elizabeth finally comes to an understanding of the full complexity of the aristocratic world by contrasting her impression of Pemberley with that of

Rosings, which seemed to justify all of her prejudices, while Darcy gains a more sympathetic impression of the middle class as a result of meeting the Gardiners, Elizabeth's supposedly vulgar relatives. Jane Austen thus makes much more significant use of change of location in Pride and Prejudice than she did in Sense and Sensibility, since the removals to London and Cleveland, neither of which has any intrinsic moral or social significance, serve only to separate the different stages in Marianne's development towards maturity.

Until Darcy's letter makes her completely reorientate her outlook, the effects of the visit to Rosings are almost entirely negative as far as Elizabeth is concerned, because the offensively arrogant Lady Catherine merely confirms her anti-aristocratic prejudices. Lady Catherine, as Elizabeth rather ungenerously anticipates, possesses no "extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue" and depends for her prestige upon "the mere stateliness of money and rank" (161). She is thus unable to add any real merit to the external beauty of her home and doubtless judges it according to the same criteria as Mr. Collins, who expects Elizabeth to be impressed by the number and cost of the windows at the front of the house. Lacking any conception of the duties of the great landowner, Lady Catherine uses her traditional position as leader of the local community simply as an excuse for over-officiously interfering in the lives of the cottagers:

Elizabeth soon perceived that though this great lady was not in the commission of the peace for the county, she was a most active magistrate in her own parish, the minutest concerns of which were carried to her by Mr. Collins; and whenever any of

the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented or too poor, she sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty. (169)

Because of Lady Catherine's failings, and because her daughter possesses neither conversational ability nor accomplishments, it is inevitable that social occasions at Rosings should be characterised by a complete absence of either good manners or talent. Thus, during her first dinner party Lady Catherine greets the guests in a snobbishly superior manner designed to make them fully aware of their inferior rank and responds with obvious pleasure to the sycophantic behaviour of Collins and Sir William Lucas:

He [Collins] carved, and ate, and praised with delighted alacrity; and every dish was commended, first by him, and then by Sir William, who was now enough recovered to echo whatever his son in law said, in a manner which Elizabeth wondered Lady Catherine could bear. But Lady Catherine seemed gratified by their excessive admiration, and gave most gracious smiles, especially when any dish on the table proved a novelty to them. (163)

Her lack of good breeding is underlined after dinner by the way in which she rudely enquires into the private affairs of both Elizabeth and her family. Besides asking "how many sisters she had, whether they were older or younger than herself, whether any of them were likely to be married, whether they were handsome, where they had been educated, what carriage her father kept, and what had been her mother's maiden name?" (164), Lady Catherine allows herself the liberty of passing her opinion on the embarrassing subject of the entail on Mr. Bennet's estate, and presumes to question Elizabeth about her accomplishments and her age. When

Elizabeth suggests politely that her final question is not a proper one to put to a lady with three younger sisters over the age of fifteen, Lady Catherine is amazed that she should be denied a direct answer.

The generally pretentious and stupid tone of the whole affair is epitomised by the games of cards in which the guests become involved at the end of the evening:

Lady Catherine, Sir William and Mr. and Mrs. Collins sat down to quadrille; and as Miss De Bourgh chose to play at cassino, the two girls had the honour of assisting Mrs. Jenkinson to make up her party. Their table was superlatively stupid. Scarcely a syllable was uttered that did not relate to the game, except when Mrs. Jenkinson expressed her fears of Miss De Bourgh's being too hot or too cold, or having too much or too little light. A great deal more passed at the other table. Lady Catherine was generally speaking--stating the mistakes of the three others, or relating some anecdote of herself. Mr. Collins was employed in agreeing to every thing her ladyship said, thanking her for every fish he won, and apologising if he thought he won too many. Sir William did not say much. He was storing his memory with anecdotes and noble names. (166)

Elizabeth gains a somewhat better impression of the aristocracy from Colonel Fitzwilliam, who is not only himself an excellent conversationalist and an extremely well-bred man, but who also makes her realise, by his description of the lot of younger sons, that the life of an aristocrat is not completely without its responsibilities and duties:

"In my opinion, the younger son of an Earl can know very little of either. Now, seriously, what have you ever known of self-denial and dependance? When have you been prevented by want of money from going wherever you chose, or procuring any thing you had a fancy for?"

"These are home questions--and perhaps I cannot say that I have experienced many hardships of that nature. But in matters of greater weight, I may suffer from the want of money. Younger sons cannot marry where they like."

"Unless where they like women of fortune, which I think they very often do."

"Our habits of expence make us too dependant, and

there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money." (183)

Unfortunately, while Fitzwilliam succeeds on this occasion in improving Elizabeth's understanding of the aristocracy he manages almost immediately afterwards to increase her awareness of its snobbish tendencies by telling her that the separation of Bingley and Jane was effected by Darcy. Although she admits that Darcy might have legitimate cause to complain against some members of her family, Elizabeth is convinced that his main objections are social:

"To Jane herself," she exclaimed, "there could be no possibility of objection. All loveliness and goodness as she is! her understanding excellent, her mind improved, and her manners captivating. Neither could any thing be urged against my father, who, though with some peculiarities, has abilities which Mr. Darcy himself need not disdain, and respectability which he will probably never reach." When she thought of her mother indeed, her confidence gave way a little, but she would not allow that any objections there had material weight with Mr. Darcy, whose pride, she was convinced, would receive a deeper wound from the want of importance in his friend's connections, than from their want of sense. (186-187)

By contrast, Darcy's respect for Elizabeth is further enhanced by comparing her excellent conduct with that of Lady Catherine, who makes him aware that bad manners are not confined to the lower ranks of society. Thus, when Lady Catherine, during another of the tedious social gatherings at Rosings, interrupts Fitzwilliam's conversation with Elizabeth about music to express her own views on the subject in general and on Elizabeth's performance in particular, "Darcy looked a little ashamed of his aunt's ill-breeding" (173). However, as he reveals indirectly during a conversation about travel, Darcy is still not prepared to admit that

Elizabeth's virtues can have derived entirely from her Longbourn background:

Mr. Darcy drew his chair a little towards her, and said, "You cannot have a right to such a very strong local attachment. You cannot have been always at Longbourn." (179)

Since Elizabeth now has more reason than ever to think badly of Darcy, and since he is no nearer to modifying his snobbish attitude towards her family and class, it is inevitable that the pattern of approach and rejection established in the novel's opening section should be continued. Moreover, if the rather pert and unnecessarily aggressive manner in which Elizabeth continues to respond to Darcy's advances is compared to her polite behaviour in the company of the much more objectionable Lady Catherine, it becomes even more clear than before that her belief that his aristocratic nature excuses her from the obligations of good manners is merely a rationalisation for her emotional need to repulse his attempts to establish communication. Despite her poor opinion of the aristocracy Elizabeth is usually too occupied with the quality of her own behaviour to demonstrate her contempt by exempting members of the class from her sphere of polite concern.

Darcy first approaches Elizabeth during the social evening at Rosings mentioned above, but she refuses to recognise his claims to attention. Thus, when he draws near to her as she plays the piano, Elizabeth greets him with the arch and extremely hostile comment,

"You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy, by coming in all this state to hear me? But I will not be alarmed though your sister does play so well. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others.

My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me." (174)

Since Darcy refuses to take her words seriously and continues with his attempt to engage her in conversation, Elizabeth becomes even more aggressive and tries to embarrass him by resurrecting her old grievance about his refusal to dance at the Meryton ball. Although Darcy successfully avoids the implicit, and quite accurate, charge that he behaved snob-bishly on that occasion by pleading a certain diffidence and shyness in conversation with new people, Elizabeth refuses to be placated. Skilfully changing the point of attack, she rebuts his excuse by explaining that, just as it is a woman's duty to develop accomplishments like playing the piano, so it is the well-orientated man's to develop social graces:

"My fingers," said Elizabeth, "do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault--because I would not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution." (175)

Her advice is good, but her purpose is not so much to help Darcy improve his future conduct as to censure him for his past behaviour.

Darcy's later approaches, which culminate in his marriage proposal, are equally unsuccessful. Although she receives his first visit to the parsonage politely, Elizabeth refuses to believe that it was inspired by anything more than boredom and thus deprives his overture of friendship of its intended significance. Further visits in company with Colonel Fitzwilliam serve only to convince Elizabeth

that Darcy is inferior to his cousin. As may have been the case with her sudden attachment to Wickham, so the affection that Elizabeth begins to form for Colonel Fitzwilliam probably arises from an unconscious need to deny the real direction of her feelings.

Darcy eventually becomes so incapacitated by his love for Elizabeth that, although he continues to place himself in her presence whenever possible, he ceases to be able to make any attempt at forming a relationship. His behaviour during encounters with Elizabeth on the edge of the Rosings' estate thus serves only to cause her puzzlement and himself embarrassment:

It seemed like wilful ill-nature, or a voluntary penance, for on these occasions it was not merely a few formal enquiries and an awkward pause and then away, but he actually thought it necessary to turn back and walk with her. He never said a great deal, nor did she give herself the trouble of talking or of listening much; but it struck her in the course of their third rencontre that he was asking some odd unconnected questions--about her pleasure in being at Hunsford, her love of solitary walks, and her opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Collins's happiness; and that in speaking of Rosings and her not perfectly understanding the house, he seemed to expect that whenever she came into Kent again she would be staying there too. (182)

This last little mystery is solved when Darcy, finally unable to suppress his love any longer, asks Elizabeth to marry him. However, since the condescending and almost unwilling manner in which Darcy makes the proposal shows very clearly that he has failed to resolve his original prejudices, Elizabeth has no hesitation in rejecting this ultimate gesture of communication as decisively as she did all his lesser ones.¹⁰ In the argument that follows she is finally induced

to give explicit expression to her aversion for Darcy:

"From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immoveable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry."
(193)

Having reached the bottom of the line at this point Elizabeth and Darcy must now dance back to the top. Darcy takes the first step towards mutual understanding the next day when he comes to Elizabeth, again while she is walking outside the railings that bound the aristocratic world of Rosings, and hands her a note justifying his previous behaviour. Not only does the very gesture of reconciliation mark a considerable breakdown of reserve on Darcy's part, but the contents of the note also compel Elizabeth to reconsider her attitude towards him. She comprehends at last that he is totally blameless with respect to Wickham and that his objections to Jane and herself were not based entirely on a blind sense of superiority, but derived in part from an awareness of the real defects of the other members of the Bennet family. However, while this realisation frees Elizabeth from that unjust part of her hostility which had served merely to suppress her feelings for Darcy, it does not immediately bring her to a realisation of this latent affection. Thus, in the course of her unsparing self-castigation, Elizabeth is still able to assert consciously that she does not love Darcy:

"How despicably have I acted!" she cried.--"I, who have prided myself on my discernment!--I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust.--How humiliating is this discovery!--Yet, how just a humiliation!--Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly.--Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself." (208)

Complete emotional liberation is not achieved by Elizabeth until her next encounter with Darcy at Pemberley.

Despite the major step forward taken during this final encounter at Rosings, Elizabeth and Darcy have by no means achieved a full understanding of each other's worlds. She now realises that the aristocracy shares some of the values of the gentry but as yet has no conception of its unique contribution to society, while he is still unable to perceive any relationship between Elizabeth's virtues and the values of the class from which she derives. Full knowledge is granted to both when Elizabeth visits Pemberley during a tour of Derbyshire with the Gardiners. By diverting the party away from its original goal, the Lake District, Jane Austen indicates that however attractive the haunts of Coleridge and Wordsworth might be in moments of disillusion they offer no real solution to the problems of social man. Since Elizabeth's emotional problems are intimately bound up in her social conflict with Darcy she can hope to achieve personal happiness only by engaging herself fully in the world around her.

Although she yields initially to her curiosity to

visit Pemberley only because she believes that there is no possibility of an encounter with its owner, Elizabeth begins to realise that she is attracted to Darcy as soon as she sees his impressive house:

It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills;-- and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! (245)

The increased respect for the aristocracy which is implicit in Elizabeth's admiration for Pemberley House, and which is responsible for this sudden liberation of feeling, is supported by the housekeeper's account of the noble manner in which Darcy fulfills his duties towards his tenants, his servants and his family. The interpretation placed on his conduct here is diametrically opposed to the one given earlier by Wickham, who argued that Darcy's excellent performance in all three of these areas was motivated by snobbish pride rather than a sense of duty:

"Can such abominable pride as his, have ever done him good?"

"Yes. It has often led him to be liberal and generous, --to give his money freely, to display hospitality, to assist his tenants, and relieve the poor. Family pride, and filial pride, for he is very proud of what his father was, have done this. Not to appear to disgrace his family, to degenerate from the popular qualities, or lose the influence of the Pemberley House, is a powerful motive. He has also brotherly pride, which with some brotherly affection, makes him a very kind and careful guardian of his sister; and you will hear him generally cried up as the most attentive and best of brothers." (81-82)

Darcy fully confirms this new picture of himself by the manner

in which he behaves after his unexpected arrival. Instead of reacting hostilely to what he might justifiably have interpreted as an impertinent intrusion, he addresses Elizabeth with an unaccustomed gentleness and lack of pretension.

Now that the value of the aristocracy in general and of Darcy in particular is clear to Elizabeth, all that remains is for Darcy to arrive at a just appreciation of the worth of her middle class connections. This is achieved almost immediately afterwards when introduction to the Gardiners, whom Darcy had supposed by their behaviour to be people of fashion, shows him that engagement in trade and gentility are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Elizabeth, by this time acutely aware that the conduct of certain members of her own family had given some justification to Darcy's earlier prejudices, is relieved that he should learn that they do not represent the norm of their class:

Elizabeth could not but be pleased, could not but triumph. It was consoling, that he should know she had some relations for whom there was no need to blush. She listened most attentively to all that passed between them, and gloried in every expression, every sentence of her uncle, which marked his intelligence, his taste, or his good manners. (255)

Darcy marks his acceptance of Elizabeth and her world by inviting Mr. Gardiner to go fishing with him and by expressing a wish to introduce her to his sister. Elizabeth now has sufficient respect for the aristocracy to value Darcy's gesture fully: "she was flattered and pleased. His wish of introducing his sister to her, was a compliment of the highest kind" (257).

Since Elizabeth and Darcy have finally achieved mutual

understanding, the pattern of approach and rejection can be broken. Thus, his invitation that she and the Gardiners dine at Pemberley is gladly accepted:

Their visitors staid with them above half an hour, and when they arose to depart, Mr. Darcy called on his sister to join him in expressing their wish of seeing Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, and Miss Bennet, to dinner at Pemberley, before they left the country. Miss Darcy, though with a diffidence which marked her little in the habit of giving invitations, readily obeyed. Mrs. Gardiner looked at her niece, desirous of knowing how she, whom the invitation most concerned, felt disposed as to its acceptance, but Elizabeth had turned away her head. Presuming, however, that this studied avoidance spoke rather a momentary embarrassment, than any dislike of the proposal, and seeing in her husband, who was fond of society, a perfect willingness to accept it, she ventured to engage for her attendance, and the day after the next was fixed on. (263-264)

However, before they can join together in the temporary union that it seems must inevitably preface the more permanent one of marriage, Elizabeth is forced to return home because of Lydia's elopement with Wickham. The separation that is effected by Elizabeth's departure from Pemberley is a crucial one because it must be permanent unless Darcy can bring himself to follow her to Longbourn, and thus prove that he really has learnt to judge her class by the conduct of its most responsible members and not according to the actions of delinquents like Lydia. In the event Darcy involves himself totally in the fortunes of the Bennet family by discovering the whereabouts of Lydia and Wickham, and by acting as prime mover in the arrangements leading up to their marriage.

This active gesture of acceptance is later reiterated through the polite medium of the formal social occasion when Darcy agrees to dine at Longbourn. Unfortunately, although his behaviour is impeccable and he even manages to endure

Mrs. Bennet's rudeness without demonstrating any sense of scorn, Darcy finds himself parted from Elizabeth throughout the evening:

Mr. Darcy was almost as far from her, as the table could divide them. (340)

The gentlemen came; and she thought he looked as if he would have answered her hopes; but, alas! the ladies had crowded round the table, where Miss Bennet was making tea, and Elizabeth pouring out the coffee, in so close a confederacy, that there was not a single vacancy near her, which would admit of a chair. (341)

Elizabeth was then hoping to be soon joined by him, when all her views were overthrown, by seeing him fall a victim to her mother's rapacity for whist players. (342)

This separation, however, constitutes only a ritualised version of the emotional and social division that existed between them for so long, and it is inevitable that his second marriage proposal will be successful.

This union of aristocracy and lesser gentry is not easily achieved in Pride and Prejudice, but it is possible, Jane Austen claims, once both Darcy and Elizabeth have realised that, despite their very different social roles, the two groups share the same system of moral values. Thus, Elizabeth briefly, but decisively, refutes Lady Catherine's claims that she is Darcy's inferior, by saying,

"In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal." (356)

Implicit in these words is a confident statement of faith in the health of a society which, although it embraces such disparate worlds as Pemberley and Gracechurch Street, is unified by a common moral ideal.

The basic emotional appeal of Pride and Prejudice is much the same as that of Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility since Jane Austen once again follows her heroine's progress as she moves from the home environment into the larger world outside that she comes to understand only after enduring a series of moral trials. Moreover, like Catherine and Henry, and Marianne and Colonel Brandon, Elizabeth and Darcy finally achieve an almost fairytale-like condition of perfect happiness in which, having reconciled the demands of the self with those of the world, they are able to enjoy "all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley" (384). Aesthetically, however, Pride and Prejudice is superior to either Northanger Abbey or Sense and Sensibility because Jane Austen presents a much fuller picture of the social world against which her heroine is seeking to define herself and because she makes much more subtle use of the formal social occasion. Besides acting as a testing ground and as a means of summing up the action at appropriate points, the individual formal social occasions in Pride and Prejudice, with their reiterated pattern of approach and rejection, serve to epitomise the novel's overall thematic movement. Thus, with the completion of Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen was fully embarked on the artistic voyage that was still to produce Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion.

CHAPTER V

MANSFIELD PARK

Fanny Price's extreme passivity and priggishness have served to make her the least popular of all Jane Austen's heroines. Marvin Mudrick, for example, argues that the whole novel is flawed by the lifelessness of Fanny and Edmund,¹ while Lionel Trilling comments that she is too simply virtuous and lacks the power of energetic movement.² Perhaps the most virulent of all the attacks on Fanny is that of Kingsley Amis, who concludes his highly emotional essay by declaring that "it is a monster of complacency and pride who, under a cloak of cringing self-abasement, dominates and gives meaning to the novel."³ Tony Tanner is one of the few critics who have tried to justify the novel, while still treating it as the story of a girl who triumphs by "doing nothing."⁴ Tanner feels that Fanny's response to her environment is the correct one because it is her duty to uphold the Mansfield values of quietness and repose against the threat of internal dissolution that is attendant upon Sir Thomas Bertram's failings as an authority figure and against the intrusion of the energetic, but anarchic, Crawfords. The rather defensive and introverted tone thus established is very different from that of Pride and Prejudice. Whereas Elizabeth Bennet is engaged in reaching out beyond her own social group to an

understanding of the values and worth of the aristocracy, Fanny Price is compelled to remain still and defend a world that is in imminent danger of collapsing. Jane Austen is, thus, not engaged in a rather mean-minded reversal of the "light and bright and sparkling" (Letters, 299) mood of Pride and Prejudice, as both Lionel Trilling and Walton Litz⁵ suggest, but is simply presenting a different kind of heroine in a very different situation.

Although Tanner accurately defines Fanny's moral role, he ignores her social development. Yet Fanny is unable to influence the inhabitants of the Mansfield world until she learns some of the charms that make Mary Crawford, for all her faults, so attractive. Like Catherine Morland, Fanny Price understands her obligations towards others but lacks the ability to fulfill them, and thus falls short of the ideal of the gentleman. Her task is, thus, a two-fold one, for while remaining static morally she must develop socially. Having found her correct moral sphere by making the initial movement from Portsmouth to Mansfield, Fanny is faced with the task of moving out of the little white attic and the school room,⁶ and becoming guardian of the whole house. As Avrom Fleishman puts it, Fanny develops from the position of ward to that of warden.⁷ It is not until Fanny, like a moral spider, is able to entangle the less morally errant Bertrams within her web of social charm that Mansfield Park can once again become a bastion of order and propriety.

The burden of Fanny's complex moral and social task

is borne by an extremely sophisticated and symbolically charged structure of social rituals. By examining not only such justly famous scenes as the excursion to Sotherton, the theatricals at Mansfield Park, and the visit to Portsmouth but also a number of equally important balls and dinner parties, it is possible to chart accurately the most important stages in Fanny's development towards maturity. Fanny's first movement is from a position of total isolation in which she is excluded from all of the Bertram family's engagements to one in which she is included in the group but is both unable and unwilling to become involved in its activities. Thus, throughout the Sotherton episode, an impromptu ball held at Mansfield Park and much of the amateur theatricals, a combination of moral scruples and lack of charm serves to keep Fanny on the edge of the circle of involvement. However, beginning with the acceptance of the part of Cottager's Wife just before Sir Thomas Bertram's return brings the theatricals to a halt, Fanny gradually takes on a more active role and, as a result of her experiences at the Grants' dinner parties, the Mansfield ball and her visit to Portsmouth, at last acquires the self-confidence and the external graces required to draw others into her moral sphere. The London and aristocratic worlds represented by the Crawfords and Mr. Yates dominate during early encounters such as the Sotherton episode and the amateur theatricals. However, Fanny is eventually able to assert the superiority of the Mansfield ideal by resisting the advances of Henry Crawford, who is attracted by her increased social poise, for so long that he finally reveals

both his own and, indirectly, his sister's, true depravity by eloping with Maria Rushworth.

Although Jane Austen's use of the formal social occasion in Mansfield Park is much more subtle and comprehensive than in her earlier novels, it is a logical development out of the structure towards which she fumbled in Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility and which she first found, albeit rather schematically, in Pride and Prejudice. In contending that Jane Austen never previously made such significant use of place and group, Robert Liddell, W.A. Craik and Marvin Mudrick are clearly guilty of underrating both the achievement of her earlier novels and the organic development of her art.⁸

By treating the childhood and education of her heroine in far greater detail than in any of her other novels, Jane Austen is able to give the reader a very precise idea not only of the source of Fanny's limitations and her virtues but also of what has gone wrong with the Mansfield ideal. The moral disease that is brought to a head by the arrival of the Crawfords can be traced back to Sir Thomas Bertram's loss of authority and to his wife's total abnegation of responsibility. Even the adoption of Fanny, the most significant change in Mansfield life before the turbulent events traced by the novel, is planned and carried out by Mrs. Norris. What motive such an unbenevolent woman could have for improving Fanny's situation is never fully explained, but it may be that she was inspired by a simple desire to assert her

influence. Certainly, Mrs. Norris regards people in general as objects to be moved around according to her own whims. Even more important, it is Mrs. Norris, and not Sir Thomas or Lady Bertram, who defines the manner in which the Bertram children should respond to their new sister. Sir Thomas is quite explicit about the nature of the relationship that he wishes to exist between Julia, Maria and Fanny:

"There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs. Norris," observed Sir Thomas, "as to the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up; how to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram. I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account, authorize in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but still they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different." (10-11)

As things turn out, however, Mrs. Norris is completely successful in persuading both the Bertram sisters and Fanny that the difference between them is not one of degree, but of kind.

Fanny becomes so convinced of her own inferiority that she feels no contradiction in the fact that, like Cinderella, she is a part of the Bertram family, yet is excluded from all its social engagements. From the moment that she is assigned to the little white attic, which is "not far from the girls, and close by the housemaids" (10), Fanny fluctuates uncomfortably between the roles of young lady and servant. As far as Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris are concerned she exists only to be "of use," but Edmund grants her a degree of consideration equal to that which he gives to either of his sisters. When her old grey pony dies it is Edmund who, despite the jealous

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the research and the objectives of the study. It then proceeds to a literature review, where the author examines previous studies on the topic. The methodology section follows, detailing the research design and data collection methods. The results section presents the findings of the study, and the conclusion summarizes the main points and offers suggestions for future research.

The second part of the paper focuses on the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the results. It discusses the statistical methods used and the significance of the findings. The author also addresses the limitations of the study and provides a final conclusion. The paper is well-structured and easy to read, with clear headings and subheadings. The language is professional and academic, suitable for a research paper. The references are up-to-date and relevant to the topic.

objections of Mrs. Norris, who argues that it would be "absolutely unnecessary, and even improper, that Fanny should have a regular lady's horse of her own" (36), contrives to secure her a new animal.

It is not surprising, in the light of Mrs. Norris's vindictive and extended campaign to exclude her from the family circle to which she properly belongs and the failure of the other Bertrams, with the exception of Edmund, to protect her, that Fanny displays a complete inadequacy in situations of human intercourse. Her lack of a fixed social role is of a different kind, but is no less debilitating, than is that of Edward Ferrars in Sense and Sensibility. The paradoxical nature of her position is questioned later by Mary Crawford:

"I begin now to understand you all, except Miss Price," said Miss Crawford, as she was walking with the Mr. Bertrams. "Pray, is she out, or is she not?--I am puzzled.--She dined at the parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being out; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she is." (48)

In one sense the subject of Mansfield Park is the "coming out" of Fanny Price, since it is not until she can find a place within the world whose proper values she understands better than anybody else that Fanny wins personal happiness and brings about the moral salvation of the group.

Just as she makes Fanny undervalue herself, so Mrs. Norris teaches Maria and Julia to think too well of themselves, with the result that they look to education only to provide them with an external veneer of knowledge and accomplishments:

Such were the counsels by which Mrs. Norris assisted to form her nieces' minds; and it is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, they should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In every thing but disposition, they were admirably taught. Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him.

To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention.. (19)

For all the distress that it brings her, the condition of subservience imposed on Fanny by Mrs. Norris does at least leave her free to acquire those very qualities of "self-knowledge, generosity, and humilty" that her cousins lack. With the help of Edmund, who directs her reading into fruitful channels, Fanny is able to reach out beyond herself and to seek to comprehend the moral standards that should direct the individual in his relations with others. This early friendship with Edmund is of crucial importance to Fanny's later development because she learns from him alone that Mansfield Park is not simply a place of repression, but also represents a traditional ideal of existence.

For all the faults of Mrs. Norris, Julia and Maria, it is the eldest of the Bertram children, Tom, who is directly responsible for allowing the external forces of disorder to enter Mansfield Park. By putting Sir Thomas in financial difficulties as a result of his extravagant spending, Tom forces him to sell the Mansfield living instead of holding it in reserve until Edmund is old enough to take orders. The Crawfords, of course, make their entry through the new incumbent, Dr. Grant, whose wife is their half-sister. While

Grant himself plays little part in the action he epitomises the kind of moral sloth that has overtaken the Bertram family, since he is much more concerned with the satisfaction of his own gluttony than with the spiritual life of his parishioners. Arriving, as they do, just after Sir Thomas Bertram's enforced visit to his plantation in Antigua has deprived Mansfield Park of its last vestiges of authority, the Crawfords are able to supply precisely the glittering charms and lack of concern for social form required to endear themselves to Maria and Julia, who look upon their father's departure not as a loss, but as a relief from unwelcome restraint. Both Mary and Henry are truly products of their environment, and their immoral cynicism can be traced back directly to the influence of a childhood spent with their unhappily married guardians, Admiral and Mrs. Crawford, and an early adulthood wasted amidst the worthless pleasures of London social life. Mary Crawford's view that marriage is a "take in" (46) thus clearly derives from her experiences with her uncle and aunt; and her equation of matrimonial eligibility with wealth, which is suggested by her determination to prefer the elder of the two Mr. Bertrams, reveals an acceptance of the standards of city friends such as Janet Ross, who married Mr. Fraser for his money and then felt aggrieved that he expected her "to be as steady as himself" (361). Although London provided the background against which the misfortunes of the Dashwood sisters were acted out in Sense and Sensibility, and was the place to which Wickham and Lydia fled in Pride and

Prejudice, it is in Mansfield Park that it first takes on a specific moral quality of its own. Drawing on the traditional view of the city as expounded by Fielding in Tom Jones, and on her own earlier treatment of it in Lady Susan,⁹ Jane Austen presents a briefly sketched but vigorous picture of a world characterised by frivolous gaiety and moral depravity. The basis of the moral distinction between town and country upon which some of the major conflicts in Mansfield Park depend is made clear later when Edmund contrasts the useful role of the clergyman in the small community with the hopelessness of any efforts that he might make to influence the anonymous and fluid population of London:

"You are speaking of London, I am speaking of the nation at large."

"The metropolis, I imagine, is a pretty fair sample of the rest."

"Not, I should hope, of the proportion of virtue to vice throughout the kingdom. We do not look in great cities for our best morality. It is not there, that respectable people of any denomination can do most good; and it certainly is not there that the influence of the clergy can be most felt. A fine preacher is followed and admired; but it is not in fine preaching only that a good clergyman will be useful in his parish and his neighbourhood, where the parish and neighbourhood are of a size capable of knowing his private character, and observing his general conduct, which in London can rarely be the case. The clergy are lost there in the crowds of their parishioners." (93)

While coming very close to destroying the Mansfield world the Crawfords also learn to appreciate the moral ideal that is here expounded by Edmund, and, consequently, almost succeed in fulfilling Mrs. Grant's prophesy that "Mansfield shall cure you both" (47). However, they prove to have been too tainted by the London way of life to be included amongst the chosen few who are finally gathered around Fanny.

The essential differences between the London and Mansfield approaches to experience are defined in the course of a highly symbolic conversation about improvements that takes place during the first dinner party at Mansfield Park.¹⁰ When Rushworth explains his plans to "improve" Sotherton, Fanny quite categorically states her aversion to the idea of destroying the avenue of trees leading up to the house and thus reveals her preference for that which has developed organically over that which is drastically innovative. Mary Crawford, on the other hand, expresses a willingness to accept the results of improvement, but not to endure the process:

". . . the only dose I ever had, being administered by not the first favourite in the world, has made me consider improvements in hand as the greatest of nuisances. Three years ago, the admiral, my honoured uncle, bought a cottage at Twickenham for us all to spend our summers in; and my aunt and I went down to it quite in raptures; but it being excessively pretty, it was soon found necessary to be improved; and for three months we were all dirt and confusion, without a gravel walk to step on, or a bench fit for use. I would have every thing as complete as possible in the country, shrubberies and flower gardens, and rustic seats innumerable; but it must be all done without my care." (57)

Mary's attitude to experience in general is summed up here since she is attracted only by the hard, glossy surfaces of life and is not interested in the difficult and often unpleasant acquisition of the moral values that should lie beneath the pleasing exterior. Unlike his sister, who is interested only in the finished product, Henry Crawford gains pleasure from the process of improvement rather than from its results. He thus expresses disappointment that the necessary improvements to his own estate at Everingham were soon planned and completed. Henry Crawford is not interested in

the long term results of his actions, but rather involves himself totally in the project of the moment, whether it be improvements, acting, or the prospect of being a sailor like William Price or a clergyman like Edmund. Each enthusiasm, however, soon runs its course and leaves him seeking a new form of entertainment. The limitations of Henry's way of life are accurately defined by his own words:

"My plan was laid at Westminster--a little altered perhaps at Cambridge, and at one and twenty executed. I am inclined to envy Mr. Rushworth for having so much happiness yet before him. I have been a devourer of my own." (61)

In their different ways both Mary and Henry Crawford reveal a stunted comprehension of the individual's moral relationship with time, she refusing to accept the role that the past plays in the shaping of the present and he involving himself totally in the present at the expense of all future considerations. In the shifting and ephemeral world of London such a loss of temporal perspective is inevitable. It is only for a person like Fanny, who is able to view the world around her from the still point of Mansfield Park, that life can be viewed as a continuum of past, present and future.

During this, the first extended meeting between the Bertrams and the Crawfords, Mary's faults are not only revealed in this indirect and rather subtle manner. Her inability to understand that the villagers' carts are not mere commodities to be procured with money, but, rather, have a useful part to play in a life constructed around such basic concerns as the harvest, emphasises the unbridgeable gap that exists between the London and Mansfield ways of life:

"The hire of a cart at any time, might not be so easy as you suppose; our farmers are not in the habit of letting them out; but in harvest, it must be quite out of their power to spare a horse."

"I shall understand all your ways in time; but coming down with the true London maxim, that every thing is to be got with money, I was a little embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence of your country customs." (58)

The vulgar pun in which she indulges herself at one point in the evening makes Mary's lack of either solid moral criteria or concern for propriety even more obvious:

"Certainly, my home at my uncle's brought me acquainted with a circle of admirals. Of Rears, and Vices, I saw enough. Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat." (60)

The dilemma which plagues Edmund's whole relationship with Mary and Fanny is established during his conversation with Fanny after the dinner party. Although he initially turns to Fanny to confirm his own disapproval of Mary's behaviour, Edmund quickly finds himself defending her, and his final judgement is one of almost self-willed approbation:

"The right of a lively mind, Fanny, seizing whatever may contribute to its own amusement or that of others; perfectly allowable, when untinctured by ill humour or roughness; and there is not a shadow of either in the countenance or manner of Miss Crawford, nothing sharp, or loud, or coarse. She is perfectly feminine, except in the instances we have been speaking of. There she cannot be justified. I am glad you saw it all as I did." (64)

Despite his awareness that Fanny's moral standards are the correct ones and that Mary deviates from the ideal that she upholds, Edmund is repeatedly drawn away from the former to the latter in this way. For much of the novel Fanny lacks the personal charm to be anything more than an occasional reminder to Edmund that in pursuing Mary he is in danger of compromising the standards upon which he has based his life.

Until Sir Thomas Bertram's unexpected return halts the amateur theatricals the influence of the Crawfords reigns almost unchecked over the Mansfield world as Edmund becomes increasingly enamoured of Mary, and Henry easily wins the affections of both Maria and Julia. Fanny is the only one of the Mansfield group sufficiently alert, morally, to resist the charms of the Crawfords but, because she is excluded from all social involvement, both by her disapproval of the behaviour of those around her and by her own limitations, she is unable to influence its conduct. The isolated, and hence impotent, position that she is forced to adopt is epitomised by the set-piece in which she looks down from Mansfield Park at the company gathered together at the Parsonage, the loop-hole through which the disturbing influence of the Crawfords has entered:

The houses, though scarcely half a mile apart, were not within sight of each other; but by walking fifty yards from the hall door, she could look down the park, and command a view of the parsonage and all its demesnes, gently rising beyond the village road; and in Dr. Grant's meadow she immediately saw the group--Edmund and Miss Crawford both on horseback, riding side by side, Dr. and Mrs. Grant, and Mr. Crawford, with two or three grooms, standing about and looking on. (67)

Although Fanny takes what is potentially her first step towards social involvement when Edmund exerts his influence to have her included in the trip to Sotherton, she remains very much on the outside during the visit because her virtue is too strict to allow her to enter into the improper actions that take place in the Wilderness, while her charms are not sufficient to draw anyone into her sphere of

correct conduct. Thus, Edmund finds himself almost automatically aligned with Fanny throughout conversations in the Chapel and on the edge of the Wilderness. During the first of these they both try to refute Mary's mocking comments about the worthlessness of the lapsed tradition of family worship, and during the second Fanny supports Edmund's extremely serious defence of the true duties of the clergyman. Yet, almost immediately afterwards, Edmund deserts Fanny and sets off with Mary on "a serpentine course" (94) deep into the Wilderness. The moral implications of Edmund's movement away from Fanny towards Mary are reflected in his physical progression out of the Chapel and into the Wilderness.

Fanny has even less influence over Maria and Julia, both of whom allow themselves to become involved in a flirtatious relationship with Henry Crawford. After riding with Julia during the journey to Sotherton, Henry switches his attention to Maria in the Chapel and quite deliberately breaks up the marriage tableau in which she is posed with her fiancé, Rushworth:

Julia called Mr. Crawford's attention to her sister, by saying, "Do look at Mr. Rushworth and Maria, standing side by side, exactly as if the ceremony were going to be performed. Have not they completely the air of it?"

Mr. Crawford smiled his acquiescence, and stepping forward to Maria, said, in a voice which she only could hear, "I do not like to see Miss Bertram so near the altar." (88)

Later in the day, Henry's conduct becomes even more improper. Having dispatched Rushworth to bring the key to open a gate that has blocked their further progress through the Wilderness, he and Maria become impatient at the delay and push round the

edge of the gate and make off together. The more general implications of the scene are made clear during the conversation between Henry and Maria preceding their escape:

"But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, gives me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out, as the starling said." As she spoke, and it was with expression, she walked to the gate; he followed her. "Mr. Rushworth is so long fetching this key!"

"And for the world you would not get out without the key and without Mr. Rushworth's authority and protection, or I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited."

"Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will." (99)

To the Bertram sisters Henry Crawford represents an opportunity to gain an irresponsible freedom from the restrictions of authority and correct behaviour. Just as she was unable to prevent Edmund going off with Mary Crawford, so Fanny is forced to watch helplessly as Henry and Maria begin to pursue their own "serpentine course" towards moral damnation. Her feeble protests are scarcely heeded and she is left behind to convey the news of their departure to Rushworth. Apart from Edmund, the only members of the Sotherton party who have any use for Fanny are Rushworth and Julia, and even to them she is no more than an object of convenience towards which they can direct complaints about the behaviour of Maria and Henry.

The pattern of interaction that is established between Edmund, Fanny and Mary during the Sotherton episode is reiterated almost immediately afterwards during a dinner party at Mansfield Park. When Mary again attacks the clergy

and hints that the prospect of an immediate living and of a consequent life of idleness motivated Edmund to enter into such an ignoble profession, Fanny once more leaps to his defence and thoroughly exposes the illogical basis of her argument. Edmund is so impressed by Fanny's display of good sense and firm morality that he stays beside her and listens to her rapturous comments on the night and the stars, but is soon inexorably drawn back to Mary Crawford and the glee:

The glee began. "We will stay till this is finished, Fanny," said he, turning his back on the window; and as it advanced, she had the mortification of seeing him advance too, moving forward by gentle degrees towards the instrument, and when it ceased, he was close by the singers, among the most urgent in requesting to hear the glee again.

Fanny sighed alone at the window till scolded away by Mrs. Norris's threats of catching cold. (113)

The lack of self confidence and social poise that makes Fanny such an inadequate rival to Mary Crawford is particularly evident during an impromptu ball held at Mansfield Park. Instead of taking the opportunity for social involvement offered by what Jane Austen emphasises is her first and hence, potentially, her "coming out" ball, Fanny, after dancing with Edmund, is left sitting amongst the chaperones who look out at the couples engaged in the courtship ritual and comment on the various marriage prospects. Tom Bertram elects to be her partner only when he wishes to escape the greater evil of playing cards with Mrs. Norris, and thus, like the distraught lovers at Sotherton, reduces her to an object of convenience.

Fanny's first hesitant step towards integration into the group is taken within the extremely dangerous context of

the amateur theatricals. Inspired by yet another intruder into the Mansfield world, the idle aristocrat, Yates, the theatricals serve both to increase existing ills, since it is during the rehearsals that Edmund's relationship with Mary and Henry's flirtation with Maria begin to assume serious proportions, and to lead the Bertrams into new improprieties. Threatened, as they now are, not only by the values of London, but also by those of Ecclesford, the home of Lord Ravenshaw, the Bertrams allow themselves to become involved in the effete, aristocratic pursuit of a full-scale theatrical production at the very moment when thoughts of Sir Thomas's dangerous voyage home should have been modifying their behaviour.

The initial objections of both Fanny and Edmund are based upon a concern for Sir Thomas and for the propriety of his home that the other members of the family lack:

"If you are resolved on acting," replied the persevering Edmund, "I must hope it will be in a very small and quiet way; and I think a theatre ought not to be attempted.--It would be taking liberties with my father's house in his absence which could not be justified." (127)

Unfortunately, after his attempt to bring the acting to a halt is overruled by his brother, Tom, supported by the equally faulty authority figures, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris, Edmund allows the prospect of taking a part opposite Mary Crawford to induce him to become actively involved in the play. By changing his position so radically, Edmund once again finds himself torn between the Fanny Price and Mary Crawford approaches to experience and makes a feeble attempt to close the gap by appealing to Fanny for her approval of

his decision:

"As I am now, I have no influence, I can do nothing; I have offended them, and they will not hear me; but when I have put them in good humour by this concession, I am not without hopes of persuading them to confine the representation within a much smaller circle than they are now in the high road for. This will be a material gain. My object is to confine it to Mrs. Rushworth and the Grants. Will not this be worth gaining?"

"Yes, it will be a great point."

"But still it has not your approbation. Can you mention any other measure by which I have a chance of doing equal good?"

"No, I cannot think of any thing else."

"Give me your approbation, then, Fanny. I am not comfortable without it."

"Oh! cousin."

"If you are against me, I ought to distrust myself--and yet. . . ." (155)

Although her guarded answers do not give him the reassurance that he wants, Edmund's affection for Mary Crawford once again overrules his respect for Fanny's firm moral standards and he accepts the part without her blessing.

With this total moral desertion on Edmund's part, Fanny finds herself more isolated than ever, but she is so convinced of the general impropriety of acting and, subsequently, of the immoral nature of the particular play to be performed,¹¹ that she rejects the rare opportunity for involvement that is offered to her along with the part of Cottager's Wife. Henry Crawford's behaviour during the rehearsals fully justifies her decision since he compounds these initial improprieties by continuing his highly irregular relationship with Maria. Perhaps attracted most by the prospect of usurping Rushworth's position, Crawford at last states his preference for the elder of the two sisters by contriving that she play Agatha to his Frederick. So blatantly flirtatious

is their conduct while supposedly rehearsing, that Rushworth is again aroused to jealousy and Mary Crawford is given the opportunity to make rather vulgar comments about their behaviour:

". . . the theatre is engaged of course by those indefatigable rehearsers, Agatha and Frederick. If they are not perfect, I shall be surprised. By the bye, I looked in upon them five minutes ago, and it happened to be exactly at one of the times they were trying not to embrace." (169)

Crawford is also indirectly responsible for driving the disappointed Julia into a reckless attachment with Yates:

Henry Crawford had trifled with her feelings; but she had very long allowed and even sought his attentions, with a jealousy of her sister so reasonable as ought to have been their cure; and now that the conviction of his preference for Maria had been forced on her, she submitted to it without any alarm for Maria's situation, or any endeavour at rational tranquility for herself.--She either sat in gloomy silence, wrapt in such gravity as nothing could subdue, no curiosity touch, no wit amuse; or allowing the attentions of Mr. Yates, was talking with forced gaiety to him alone, and ridiculing the acting of the others. (160)

However, even though she is aware that it is characterised by a complete lack of order, propriety and decorum, the world of the theatricals retains a peculiar attraction for Fanny, and her attitude begins to undergo a subtle change. So conscious is Fanny made of her own isolation by watching the others involved in a common pursuit from which she alone is excluded that she even starts to feel pangs of regret that she yielded to Mrs. Grant the consequence that might have been gained by taking a part in the play :

She alone was sad and insignificant; she had no share in any thing; she might go or stay, she might be in the midst of their noise or retreat from it to the solitude of the East room, without being seen or missed. She could almost think any thing would have been preferable to this. Mrs. Grant was of consequence; her good nature had honourable

mention--her taste and her time were considered--her presence was wanted--she was sought for and attended, and praised; and Fanny was at first in some danger of envying her the character she had accepted. (159-160)

Although she is at first able to satisfy this need for involvement vicariously by watching the rehearsals and by acting occasionally as a prompter, Fanny is eventually given a painful reminder of the rewards of full participation in the group when she is followed into the schoolroom by Edmund and Mary and forced to watch them act out a love scene before her. As in the progression from Church to Wilderness during the Sotherton episode, so the protagonists' inner conflicts are mirrored by the physical setting of this incident. Fanny has now become so conscious of the claims of the world around her that she is no longer able to escape them even within the sanctuary of the schoolroom which, with its books, its Romantic transparencies and its sketch of William's ship, the Antwerp, had previously served as a private world in which she had been able to gain consolation for her isolated position. Thus, for the first time Fanny feels a real clash between the dictates of her conscience and the attractions of the world around her. So strong does this impulse towards involvement become that only the return of Sir Thomas prevents her from accepting the part of Cottager's Wife when it is once again offered. While Fanny would have been morally wrong to have associated herself with the theatricals, it marks a vital step in her development towards maturity that she should even attempt to effect a compromise between the demands of the conscience and those of the group.

Although Sir Thomas Bertram, like Odysseus, drives away the suitors and puts his house in order, the Mansfield world is by now too thoroughly flawed for any renewal of authority to prevent the forces of moral anarchy playing themselves out to a conclusion. The family circle which Sir Thomas joyfully forms around himself lacks any real harmony and his jurisdiction is now resented more than ever. A sense of gloom once again pervades the household:

Sir Thomas's return made a striking change in the ways of the family, independent of Lovers' Vows. Under his government, Mansfield was an altered place. Some members of their society sent away and the spirits of many others saddened, it was all sameness and gloom, compared with the past; a sombre family-party rarely enlivened. (196)

Indeed, instead of curing the ills of Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas succeeds almost immediately in increasing them, for Maria, having despaired of winning Henry Crawford, rushes into a totally insuitable marriage with the foolish Rushworth, partly because she still finds his wealth and position in life attractive, but mainly because she wants to escape her father's influence. The surface correctness of their wedding serves only to underline the mockery of a marriage into which they are entering:

It was a very proper wedding. The bride was elegantly dressed --the two bridesmaids were duly inferior--her father gave her away--her mother stood with salts in her hand, expecting to be agitated--her aunt tried to cry--and the service was impressively read by Dr. Grant. (203)

Despite his inability to exercise full control over his family, Sir Thomas is not without moral faculties or kindness, and the most important long term consequence of his return home is his realisation of Fanny's claims to recognition.

Not only does his absence make Sir Thomas generally more aware of his emotional responsibilities to his family as a whole, with the result that he anxiously calls Fanny to him when she excludes herself from the group that greets him as he re-enters the house, but he also learns to understand some of her personal qualities. Sir Thomas finds that Fanny, unlike his own restless daughters, is always willing to pay him the compliment of listening to tales about his journey and that she is as contented as himself with the renewed tranquillity of Mansfield life. With increased respect comes, as Edmund tells Fanny, an increased regard for her personal appearance:

"Your uncle thinks you very pretty, dear Fanny--and that is the long and the short of the matter. Anybody but myself would have made something more of it, and anybody but you would resent that you had not been thought very pretty before; but the truth is, that your uncle never did admire you till now--and now he does. Your complexion is so improved!--and you have gained so much countenance!--and your figure--Nay, Fanny, do not turn away about it--it is but an uncle." (197-198)

The considerable steps towards social emergence that Fanny takes during the next stage of the novel depend very much on this change in attitude on Sir Thomas's part. Thus, having moved from the schoolroom to the drawing room as a result of Lady Bertram's need for a companion after Julia's departure for Brighton with Maria's wedding party, Fanny is then able, with Sir Thomas's help, to begin her entry into the world outside by accepting an invitation to dine with the Grants. Through her experiences on this occasion, at a subsequent dinner party given by the Grants, at a ball at Mansfield

Park and during her visit to Portsmouth, Fanny eventually acquires the social graces needed to make her moral stance attractive to others. Although Edmund remains for a long time completely blind to her increasing charms and continues his by now almost frenetic pursuit of Mary Crawford, Fanny makes such an impression on Henry Crawford that he falls in love with her and determines to accept her way of life. It is in her efforts to resist the almost universal attempts to make her accept Henry's offer of marriage that Fanny's morality receives its most severe test. By holding firm to her conviction that, despite his apparently changed outlook, Henry Crawford cannot be excused for his earlier conduct, Fanny not only causes him to tire of the role that he has adopted and to revert to type by eloping with Maria, but also indirectly exposes Mary Crawford's lack of moral standards and thus frees Edmund from a disastrous involvement. Although, as with the theatricals, Fanny discovers that social involvement imposes severe tests on personal integrity, she also learns that it is the only means by which the individual can influence those around him. It is, thus, as a direct result of Fanny's achievement of personal maturity that the rapidly disintegrating Mansfield world is restored to a condition of harmony and repose.

Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris have become so accustomed, in their different ways, to Fanny's subservient position within the family group that neither can reconcile herself to the idea of her accepting her first invitation to dine with

the Grants. Lady Bertram is unwilling to be separated from one who is so "useful" to her, and Mrs. Norris snobbishly asserts that Fanny is stepping outside her rank in daring to enter into such a social engagement. Sir Thomas, however, is convinced of the propriety of the invitation being offered to "Lady Bertram's niece" (218), and only expresses surprise that this mark of recognition was not extended to her earlier. So determined is he that Fanny shall go to dinner in a manner befitting a member of his family that he immediately rebukes Mrs. Norris for her mean-minded attempts at minimising her consequence by denying her the carriage:

"My dear Sir Thomas!" cried Mrs. Norris, red with anger, "Fanny can walk."

"Walk!" repeated Sir Thomas, in a tone of most unanswerable dignity, and coming farther into the room.-- "My niece walk to a dinner engagement at this time of the year!" (221)

Although Fanny still has a sufficiently low opinion of herself to rate "her own claims to comfort even as low as Mrs. Norris could" (221) and determines to take no active part in the events of the evening, but rather "to sit silent and unattended to" (223), she is by no means blind to the significance of the invitation and is filled with a sense of eager anticipation:

Simple as such an engagement might appear in other eyes, it had novelty and importance in her's, for excepting the day at Sotherton, she had scarcely ever dined out before; and though now going only half a mile and only to three people, still it was dining out, and all the little interests of preparation were enjoyments in themselves. (219)

For much of the evening Fanny is successful in excluding herself from direct involvement with those around

her, but she finally becomes so annoyed by Henry Crawford's offensive comments about the theatricals that she is forced, very much against her will, to take part in the drawing-room conversation:

He seemed determined to be answered; and Fanny, averting her face, said with a firmer tone than usual, "As far as I am concerned, sir, I would not have delayed his return for a day. My uncle disapproved it all so entirely when he did arrive, that in my opinion, every thing had gone quite far enough." (225)

These few words have a startling effect on Henry Crawford, for not only does he quickly acquiesce to Fanny's point of view but he also makes several determined attempts to engage her in further conversation and continues to make observations to her throughout the rest of the evening. By asserting herself, even momentarily, Fanny makes Henry Crawford aware that she is a person of unique qualities and not merely an object that can be conveniently ignored.

Since Henry's new-found interest in Fanny proves to him that "her air, her manner, her tout ensemble, is so indescribably improved" (230), he quickly develops romantic aspirations towards her. Although he is at first inspired only to make her fall in love with him, the further improvement both in spirit and appearance that is produced in Fanny by the arrival of her beloved brother, William, soon makes Henry's attraction a genuine one:

[Henry Crawford] saw, with lively admiration, the glow of Fanny's cheek, the brightness of her eye, the deep interest, the absorbed attention, while her brother was describing any of the imminent hazards, or terrific scenes, which such a period, at sea, must supply.

It was a picture which Henry Crawford had moral taste enough to value. Fanny's attractions increased--increased

two-fold--for the sensibility which beautified her complexion and illumined her countenance, was an attraction in itself. He was no longer in doubt of the capabilities of her heart. She had feeling, genuine feeling. It would be something to be loved by such a girl, to excite the first ardours of her young, unsophisticated mind! She interested him more than he had foreseen. A fortnight was not enough. His stay became indefinite. (235-236)

Crawford's affection for Fanny is particularly evident during a later dinner party at Mansfield Parsonage, since he tries to excuse himself for his conduct at Sotherton, pays her an extremely broad compliment on her dancing and, at the moment of departure, seizes her shawl and pays her the attention of placing it around her shoulders. Yet, to argue, as Marvin Mudrick does,¹² that Henry Crawford's regard for Fanny is anything more than another of his temporary enthusiasms, nurtured and prolonged this time by Fanny's opposition, is to ignore the subtle implications of the conversation that takes place during the game of speculation in which the guests engage themselves after dinner. Crawford's account of the manner in which he lost his way and stumbled upon Thornton Lacey, which is to be Edmund's living after his ordination, is emblematic of his attempt to usurp Edmund's emotional and moral role in Fanny's life. The extent to which Crawford is incapable of comprehending the new moral code with which he is striving to associate himself is clearly revealed when he outlines his extensive plans to "improve" Thornton Lacey, which would serve, as Mary interprets them, "to shut out the church, sink the clergyman" and produce in their place "the respectable, elegant, modernized, and occasional residence of a man of independent fortune" (248). Despite his attraction

to Fanny and his temporary acceptance of her way of life, we can assume that once he had married her he would have engaged himself in a similar process of improvement. Crawford's lack of firm moral purpose is underlined by the way in which he easily fluctuates between his plans for Thornton Lacey and his concern with the game of speculation:

"My plan may not be the best possible; I had not many minutes to form it in: but you must do a good deal. The place deserves it, and you will find yourself not satisfied with much less than it is capable of.--(Excuse me, your ladyship must not see your cards. There, let them lie just before you.) The place deserves it, Bertram." (243)

Edmund, by contrast, is willing to accept his new spiritual home as it stands and intends to make only such modifications as are consistent with giving it a more gentlemanly air:

"And I have two or three ideas also," said Edmund, "and one of them is that very little of your plan for Thornton Lacey will ever be put in practice. I must be satisfied with rather less ornament and beauty. I think the house and premises may be made comfortable, and given the air of a gentleman's residence without any very heavy expense, and that must suffice me; and I hope may suffice all who care about me." (242)

Although his final remark is directed towards Mary Crawford, in reality only Fanny Price is fit to accompany him to a place where innovation and show count for nothing, and the virtues of a gentleman for all. Mary deliberately emphasises her hostility to Edmund's plans almost immediately afterwards by gambling rashly in order to win a hand of speculation and commenting, "There, I will stake my last like a woman of spirit. No cold prudence for me. I am not born to sit still and do nothing. If I lose the game, it shall not be from not striving for it" (243).

The most significant single mark of Fanny's gradual social emergence is the ball that Sir Thomas plans almost entirely in her honour. Although Fanny still lacks sufficient respect for herself to realise that this ball is generally considered as her "coming out," she anticipates the opportunity for social involvement with pleasure and plans

To dance without much observation or any extraordinary fatigue, to have strength and partners for about half the evening, to dance a little with Edmund, and not a great deal with Mr. Crawford, to see William enjoy himself and be able to keep away from her aunt Norris. (267)

By granting her the privilege of opening the ball, Sir Thomas forces Fanny into a position of far greater prominence than she would have ever accepted willingly. Nevertheless, she acquits herself with surprising poise and is admired by the company in general and by Sir Thomas in particular:

Young, pretty, and gentle, however, she had no awkwardnesses that were not as good as graces, and there were few persons present that were not disposed to praise her. She was attractive, she was modest, she was Sir Thomas's niece, and she was soon said to be admired by Mr. Crawford. It was enough to give her general favour. Sir Thomas himself was watching her progress down the dance with much complacency; he was proud of his niece, and without attributing all her personal beauty, as Mrs. Norris seemed to do, to her transplantation to Mansfield, he was pleased with himself for having supplied every thing else;--education and manners she owed to him. (276)

Increased charm, however, still fails to bring Fanny any immediate reward because Edmund, while admitting that she is one of "the two dearest objects I have on earth" (264), chooses to ask Mary Crawford for the important first two dances and leaves Henry free to announce his romantic intentions by engaging her. Edmund's inability to understand, consciously, that Fanny is no longer his frightened little

ten year old cousin, but is, rather, an attractive and eligible young woman of eighteen, now becomes particularly irritating to the reader, especially as he sees enough of the worth that makes her so fit to be his wife to retire to her in search of comfort and repose after making further unsuccessful attempts at altering Mary Crawford's poor opinion of the clergy:

His mind was fagged, and her happiness sprung from being the friend with whom it could find repose. "I am worn out with civility," said he. "I have been talking incessantly all night, and with nothing to say. But with you, Fanny, there may be peace." (278)

Although Fanny's situation is particularly frustrating and apparently hopeless at this point, Jane Austen gives a clear symbolic indication of the only proper way in which her novel can end when the chain that Henry Crawford forces upon her fails to fit William's cross and thus leaves her free to wear the one given her by Edmund.

However, before order can be restored Fanny is forced to endure a series of extremely severe tests following her refusal of Crawford's marriage proposal. Although Fanny once again finds herself in an isolated position as Sir Thomas, Lady Bertram, Mary Crawford and even her beloved Edmund press her to accept Henry Crawford, it is generically different from her earlier condition of enforced solitude, because her exclusion from the group is now entirely a matter of moral choice. Henry Crawford is socially and personally attractive and, as Sir Thomas points out, has both "situation in life, fortune and character," and "more than common

agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to everybody" (316) to recommend him, but he is totally unacceptable to Fanny because he lacks moral worth. The short-sighted and petty arguments advanced to make Fanny change her mind serve only to emphasise the validity of her position. It emerges that Sir Thomas Bertram, despite his increased respect for Fanny, still regards her as a social inferior since he is completely unable to understand why a poor girl should refuse the offer of a socially advantageous marriage. Even though he tried to release Maria from her engagement to Rushworth as soon as he realised that she had no affection for him, Sir Thomas refuses to accept Fanny's plea that "I--I cannot like him, Sir, well enough to marry him" (315). For all his faults Sir Thomas has never previously allowed snobbish values of the kind usually associated only with Mrs. Norris to pervert his social vision so drastically. The basic assumptions underlying Lady Bertram's approval of Henry's proposal are so inadequate as to become comic. For her it is important simply that Fanny is sought in marriage by a man of fortune because this will provide proof of the external attractions of yet one more of her "handsome family" (333). To Fanny, however, the most distressing and offensive of all the attempts to make her marry Henry are those of Edmund and Mary. Although Edmund begins quite reasonably by expressing respect for Fanny's personal aversion to Henry, he has become so enamoured of the Crawfords and their way of life that he eventually tries to refute all of her objections.

In arguing that there is no essential temperamental difference between Fanny and Henry Crawford, that his behaviour during the theatricals was not inexcusable and that her firm principles will be his salvation, Edmund is simply reiterating the defence of his own feelings for Mary. To have admitted that there was an unbridgeable gap between Fanny and Henry would have been to deny the very basis of his own relationship with Mary. Yet, besides confirming Henry's basic worthlessness, Mary's argument that Fanny should glory in the capture of such a successful flirt reveals that, despite her prolonged contact with Edmund, she has learnt none of the essentials of the Mansfield ideal. For Mary, marriage is still clearly more a matter of prestige and wealth than personal regard. Fanny emerges from this conversation more sure than ever not only that she was right in refusing Henry, but also that Edmund's marital aspirations are foolish:

In their very last conversation, Miss Crawford, in spite of some amiable sensations, and much personal kindness, had still been Miss Crawford, still shewn a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light. She might love, but she did not deserve Edmund by any other sentiment. (367)

Henry Crawford's behaviour during their next formal encounter at Mansfield Park fully justifies Fanny's objections. His ability to take up a copy of Shakespeare's works and to give a convincing rendition of passages with which he had been previously unacquainted, and his expressed desire to be a distinguished preacher, called upon only to deliver occasional sermons to an educated London audience, very clearly demonstrate the shallow nature both of his talents

and of his moral and religious convictions. Yet, so determined are the Bertrams to force Fanny into marriage that they not only ignore all indications of Crawford's worthlessness but also deprive her of even the most minimal protection owed to her as a member of the family group. Thus, when Henry Crawford indicates shortly afterwards that he would like to plead his cause, Edmund allows him free access to Fanny despite her obvious distress:

. . . as Edmund perceived, by his drawing in a chair, and sitting down close by her, that it was to be a very thorough attack, that looks and undertones were to be well tried, he sank as quietly as possible into a corner, turned his back, and took up a newspaper, very sincerely wishing that dear little Fanny might be persuaded into explaining away that shake of the head to the satisfaction of her ardent lover; and as earnestly trying to bury every sound of the business from himself in murmurs of his own, over the various advertisements of "a most desirable estate in South Wales"--"To Parents and Guardians"--and a "Capital season'd Hunter."

Fanny, meanwhile, vexed with herself for not having been as motionless as she was speechless, and grieved to the heart to see Edmund's arrangements, was trying, by every thing in the power of her modest gentle nature, to repulse Mr. Crawford, and avoid both his looks and enquiries; and he unrepulsable was persisting in both. (341-342)

She is, however, saved from Crawford's unwelcome attentions on this occasion when the entry of Baddely with the tea brings about a temporary restoration of group harmony:

Fanny could hardly have kept her seat any longer, or have refrained from at least trying to get away in spite of all the too public opposition she foresaw to it, had it not been for the sound of approaching relief, the very sound which she had been long watching for, and long thinking strangely delayed.

The solemn procession, headed by Baddely, of tea-board, urn, and cake-bearers, made its appearance, and delivered her from a grievous imprisonment of body and mind. Mr. Crawford was obliged to move. She was at liberty, she was busy, she was protected. (344)

By heavily underlining the ritualistic implications of the

tea ceremony Jane Austen emphasises that while life at Mansfield Park may retain a veneer of surface propriety, ironically, all sense of the broader implications of such group formalities has been lost. Once the dishes have been cleared away Fanny will once more be on her own.

Since Fanny refuses to submit to any of these attempts at coercion Sir Thomas finally takes the drastic step of sending her on a visit to her parents in Portsmouth in the hope that, as a result of being exposed to a different moral environment, she will come to appreciate better what she owes to Mansfield Park. Fanny does indeed learn many lessons during her exile but not quite the ones that Sir Thomas had envisaged, since the atmosphere of disorder and riot that characterises her Portsmouth home serves only to make her more appreciative of the ideal of order and repose for which Mansfield Park should stand, and thus ever more aware that it would be wrong to marry the reckless Henry Crawford. Her obstinate resistance finally receives full vindication when Mansfield life is thrown into a state of complete chaos as long latent flaws break into full view. Crawford elopes with Maria, Julia marries the worthless Yates and Tom is brought near to death by a fall while engaged in irresponsible pleasures. It is these disasters that herald the recall of Fanny, who is at last seen as an indispensable agent of order.

This crucial test, however, is not quite so clear-cut as might seem from the summary given above, and Fanny's time in Portsmouth is not totally occupied with the negative

task of awaiting moral justification. Not only does she engage herself in trying to bring order into her parents' home, but she is also forced to resist the renewed attentions of Crawford who becomes ever more attractive as the prospect of restoring the Mansfield ideal becomes dimmer. While Fanny's attempts at involving herself in the affairs of the Price family are by no means totally successful it is a mark of her increased maturity that she should even attempt to take an active role in the lives of those around her. Although the Prices as a whole are beyond redemption and have only the potentiality for the kind of "Sunday" order that is achieved once a week by dressing up and strolling on the promenade, Fanny is able to solve one minor, but recurrent, dispute by buying Betsey a silver knife to prevent her from continually trying to claim possession of Susan's, and sets up a small bastion against disorder in her bedroom where she begins the rescue operation that eventually takes Susan to Mansfield Park.

Henry Crawford's attempts to win Fanny after his unexpected arrival in Portsmouth constitute at once the greatest performance of a man who is characterised by his chameleon ability to adopt roles and the most opportunist enterprise of a man who has always lived by his wits. He tries to insinuate himself into Fanny's affections partly by emphasising his own reformed nature and partly by stressing the hopelessness of her present situation. The execution of the first of these two tasks is inevitably aided by the

contrast between Crawford's good manners and gentlemanly bearing and the rude behaviour and slovenly appearance of Mr. Price:

They were then to set forward for the dock-yard at once, and the walk would have been conducted (according to Mr. Crawford's opinion) in a singular manner, had Mr. Price been allowed the entire regulation of it, as the two girls, he found, would have been left to follow, and keep up with them, or not, as they could, while they walked on together at their own hasty pace. He was able to introduce some improvement occasionally, though by no means to the extent he wished; he absolutely would not walk away from them; and, at any crossing, or any crowd, when Mr. Price was only calling out, "Come girls--come, Fan--come, Sue--take care of yourselves--keep a sharp look out," he would give them his particular attendance. (403)

However, Henry Crawford is not content merely to rely upon the distortion of moral perspective produced by the vulgar environment of Portsmouth, but continually stresses his own good qualities. Besides being amusing and polite both to herself and to her family, he boasts to Fanny of the manner in which he has been fulfilling his duties as landlord:

For her approbation, the particular reason of his going into Norfolk at all, at this unusual time of year, was given. It had been real business, relative to the renewal of a lease in which the welfare of a large and (he believed) industrious family was at stake. He had suspected his agent of some underhand dealing--of meaning to bias him against the deserving--and he had determined to go himself, and thoroughly investigate the merits of the case. He had gone, had done even more good than he had foreseen, had been useful to more than his first plan had comprehended, and was now able to congratulate himself upon it, and to feel, that in performing a duty, he had secured agreeable recollections for his own mind. (404)

Fanny is duly impressed by Crawford's actions and words and, on parting, is already able to think of him more favourably than ever before:

. . . she had never seen him so agreeable--so near being agreeable; his behaviour to her father could not offend, and

there was something particularly kind and proper in the notice he took of Susan. He was decidedly improved. (406)

In arriving at this judgement Fanny reveals that her usually highly perceptive critical faculties have been dulled by her long, tedious sojourn in Portsmouth because she has clearly missed the significance of Crawford's comment that, while engaged in his errand of mercy, he had "introduced himself to some tenants, whom he had never seen before; he had begun making acquaintance with cottages whose very existence, though on his own estate, had been hitherto unknown to him" (404). Crawford's concern for his estate is clearly a temporary whim deriving directly from his attempt to present himself to Fanny as a reformed rake.

When they next meet, Henry Crawford changes his approach and plays on the difficulties surrounding any long journey at this time by pointing out to Fanny that she is literally, as well as emotionally, exiled from Mansfield Park unless she accepts his help:

"I am aware that you may be left here week after week, if Sir Thomas cannot settle every thing for coming himself, or sending your aunt's maid for you, without involving the slightest alteration of the arrangements which he may have laid down for the next quarter of a year. This will not do. . . . If you feel yourself at all less strong, or comfortable than usual, and will only let my sister know it, give her only the slightest hint, she and I will immediately come down, and take you back to Mansfield." (410-411)

Having created an excellent impression and having convinced Fanny that he alone can promise her immediate removal from Portsmouth, Crawford takes his leave with the final comment that he might again return to his estate and free it of a rascally steward. His task is now to be patient

and allow the stultifying forces of Portsmouth life to grind down Fanny's health and will until she is ready to call him back to be her saviour. Although the forces of disorder seem very near to victory at this moment it is perhaps inevitable that, given his vacillating character, Henry Crawford is not able to endure the period of waiting and soon finds a new source of excitement. Instead of going to Norfolk, Crawford delays in London and occupies himself with enticing Maria into an elopement. Thus, while Fanny's moral strength is strained to its limits during her visit to Portsmouth and is, indeed, almost found wanting, it holds firm for long enough to expose fully the basic flaws in Henry Crawford's character.

Beginning with this elopement and the consequent recall of Fanny to Mansfield Park, the tangled web of involvements that comprises the plot of the novel is quickly unravelled and harmony restored. Mary Crawford's cynical and worldly reaction to Henry's inexcusable behaviour at last convinces Edmund that she falls short of any acceptable moral standards and that hers are the incurable faults "of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind" (456); Sir Thomas finally becomes aware that his conduct as a parent has been gravely deficient; and even Julia and Tom begin to make efforts to correct their way of life. The corrupting influences are rapidly dispelled as Mrs. Norris leaves to keep her beloved Maria company in exile and the Grants move to London where Dr. Grant takes up precisely the kind of fashionable living that Edmund earlier condemned. Mary Crawford, who has

learnt enough of Mansfield values to be dissatisfied with the London society to which she returns, and Henry Crawford, who is left with deep regrets at losing Fanny, are both finally excluded from a world whose worth they came to understand while trying to destroy it. All that now remains is for Edmund Bertram to learn first to love and then to marry Fanny Price, thus giving concrete recognition to her newly-won maturity. After a short removal to Thornton Lacey they inevitably take their place in the Mansfield Parsonage which becomes vacant with the convenient death of the incumbent, Dr. Grant. It is, thus, by restoring the spiritual significance to the very place through which the Crawfords made their entry that Fanny and Edmund complete the moral rebirth of Mansfield Park.

Fanny Price is not the most attractive of Jane Austen's heroines and neither is she meant to be. The forces threatening Mansfield Park both from within and without are too dangerous to permit of a heroine who has more than the most minimal regard for the self. Yet Fanny, unlike the even more obviously virtuous Celia in Volpone, does behave in the true heroic manner by actively grappling with and destroying the forces of anarchy. It is precisely because of the actions of its heroine that Mansfield Park ends with the optimistic tone that Volpone lacks.

Much adverse comment has been forthcoming about the rather perfunctory manner in which Jane Austen completes Mansfield Park and about the rather vague nature of her

account of Edmund's courtship of Fanny.¹³ Yet Jane Austen seeks to underline rather than conceal the novel's rather abrupt conclusion:

Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest. (461)

She similarly strives to emphasise rather than to suppress the arbitrary tone of her description of the growth of Edmund's love for Fanny:

I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. --I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (470)

In both cases it is clear that she feels her task to be complete and that further stress is unnecessary. As in the myth, or the fairytale, once the forces of order have won their prolonged battle with chaos nothing can hinder, even for a moment, the restoration of a harmonious society. Edmund, indeed, needs time to forget Mary Crawford, and Fanny, for all the steps that she has taken towards maturity during the novel, requires a period of complete acceptance within the bosom of the Bertram family before she can blossom fully. It must not be forgotten that even while yearning for a return to Mansfield Park during the troubled days of Tom's illness, Fanny still tends to view herself as an inferior being and desires only that "she might have been of service to every creature in the house" (432). Nevertheless, given

the situation and personality of both hero and heroine it is inevitable that these final developments will be accomplished, and Jane Austen can safely leave the reader to imagine for himself the exact details of the events that lead up to a marriage in which, like those that complete the fairytale, "The happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be" (473).

Because of the rather introverted character of its heroine, Mansfield Park is one of Jane Austen's least popular novels. Nevertheless, it is also one of her greatest artistic creations because, by structuring so much of her action around a few fully realised formal social occasions she manages to establish a much firmer sense of the interplay between the heroine and her world than in any of her earlier novels and manages to create set-piece scenes, such as the Sotherton excursion and the amateur theatricals, that are unsurpassed even in Emma and Persuasion.

CHAPTER VI

EMMA

The world of Emma, as has frequently been remarked, is at once the smallest and the most complete of Jane Austen's fictional milieus since, in going through the complex process towards self and social realisation, Emma Woodhouse only once strays beyond the boundaries marked out by the village of Highbury and the three houses, Hartfield, Donwell Abbey and Randalls.¹ The division between the world of meaningful values and the territory that lies outside of it is thus much more rigidly maintained than in any of her other novels. It is only in her creation of London in Mansfield Park that Jane Austen is able to produce a vivid, but extremely distant and stylised picture comparable to those that emerge of Maple Grove, the epitome of all pretentious bourgeois vulgarity, and of Enscombe, the bastion of snobbish gentility. The forces produced by these worlds may intrude into a Mansfield Park or a Highbury, but they are themselves physically as well as morally outside of the proper sphere of Jane Austen's heroines.

However, while Emma and Mansfield Park are both novels concerned with justifying the claims of the existing moral order against those of interlopers, they differ essentially in tone because, whereas Henry and Mary Crawford come very

near to overturning a world that has already been weakened by internal dissent, there is never the slightest suggestion that the stability of Highbury is threatened by either Frank Churchill or Mrs. Elton. With the exception of Emma herself, the people of Highbury, Mr. Woodhouse, the Westons, Mr Knightley, Miss Bates and the host of peripheral villagers such as Mrs Goddard, Mrs. Ford, Perry and Mrs. Wallis,² live in a condition of harmony and mutual esteem. When Mr. Woodhouse needs companions while Emma visits the Coles, the services of Mrs. Bates and Mrs. Goddard are readily secured. Similarly, the more fortunate villagers repeatedly assert themselves to help the impoverished Bateses. Mr. Woodhouse, for example, gives them a hind-quarter of pork and Mr. Knightly^e sends them the last of his apples, puts his carriage at their disposal before the Coles' dinner party and enquires whether he can be of service to them during his business trip to Kingston. What the villagers realise is that, while rank and wealth are important in such matters as marriage, they provide no excuse for neglecting one's everyday duties towards one's fellows. Thus, Mr. Woodhouse, in whom all of the Highbury virtues and vices are writ large, is acutely concerned even for the personal feelings of his coachman:

"You got Hannah that good place. Nobody thought of Hannah till you mentioned her--James is so obliged to you!"

"I am very glad I did think of her. It was very lucky, for I would not have had poor James think himself slighted upon any account." (9)

The Highbury way of life is clearly too well regulated for the inhabitants to find either the gaudy delights of Maple

Grove or the restless energy of Frank Churchill attractive.

However, all is not completely well in Highbury because the inhabitants have become so content with their lot in life that they tend not merely to resist unwelcome intruders, but to be opposed to anything that threatens the status quo. The twin leaders of Highbury society, Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley, are both, in their different ways, enemies of change. Mr. Woodhouse, of course, serves as a reminder of the total atrophy that can result from a refusal to admit that the social organism must continually modify itself in response to changing conditions, and is long past the stage when either the perverse activities of his daughter or the disruptive influence of Frank Churchill can stir him to new life. Thus, although Mr. Woodhouse's verdict that "That young man is not quite the thing" (249) is an accurate one, it does not derive from any awareness of Frank Churchill's very serious faults but simply from his annoying habit of bustling about and leaving open doors. Even visits to Donwell Abbey and Randalls have become rare events for Mr. Woodhouse and he is almost totally disorientated by "poor" Miss Taylor's removal from Hartfield after her marriage to Mr. Weston. In Mr. Woodhouse's view the world already exists in a state of near perfection and can only be damaged by any change that affects himself.

Mr. Knightley, on the other hand, represents the Highbury ideal at its best. Responsible in his duties as a landowner, a magistrate and a member of the community, he

always directs his own conduct according to the very highest standards and frequently strives to correct Emma in her more irresponsible moments. His behaviour during the first dinner party at Highbury is typical in that he divides his time between passing pointed, but good-humoured, comments to Emma about her wilful nature, discussing his estate and points of law arising out of his duties as a magistrate with his brother, and acting as a tactful peacemaker when a squabble threatens to develop between Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. John Knightley. Yet, even he is in danger of becoming too content with his lot in life and has allowed himself to reach the age of thirty-seven without once thinking of altering his condition by entering into matrimony. By excluding himself from the dancing at Randalls and by opposing the Crown ball, Mr. Knightley implicitly denies his eligibility for, or interest in, marriage.

The efforts of these two agents of conservatism are, on occasion, aided by Mr. John Knightley, who is too conscious of the benefits of family life to admit that anything can be gained from a widening of the social circle. He thus finds even a hint of bad weather sufficient excuse to object ill-humouredly to venturing out to the Randalls' dinner party; is amazed at the sociability that inspires Mr. Weston "to quit the tranquillity and independence of his own fireside, and on the evening of a cold sleety April day rush out again into the world" (303) after a day of business in London; and speaks rather disapprovingly of Emma's increased social life:

"I hope I am aware that they [his children] may be too noisy for your father--or even may be some incumbrance to you, if your visiting-engagements continue to increase as much as they have done lately."

"Increase!"

"Certainly; you must be sensible that the last half year has made a great difference in your way of life."

"Difference! No indeed I am not."

"There can be no doubt of your being much more engaged with company than you used to be. Witness this very time. Here am I come down for only one day, and you are engaged with a dinner-party!--When did it happen before, or any thing like it? Your neighbourhood is increasing, and you mix more with it." (311-312)

Highbury is not, then, as Trilling and Rubinstein argue,³ Jane Austen's idyll, and idealisation of a world that she knows will soon be destroyed by "the actualities . . . of the modern self,"⁴ but, as far as the author is concerned, is a real place that has become idyllic to its inhabitants. The following description of Highbury, given by G. Armour Craig and cited by Rubinstein in support of his case, applies only to the village as it is at the beginning of the novel:

Highbury may be small and serene, but like The Crown, its principal inn, it is just a little seedy. The quality of the neighbourhood is declining; there are no longer enough county families even to provide a homogenous guest list for a ball. Emma's father, the first citizen, is a comic valetudinarian who rarely leaves his house and who cannot stand change.⁵

Things are very different by the end. The Crown has been spruced up as a result of the preparations necessary for the ball inspired by Frank Churchill; the very fact of the Crown ball proves that it was lack of impetus rather than of respectable families that had caused such functions to lapse; and, by his marriage to Emma, Mr. Knightley has assumed authority over Hartfield as well as Donwell Abbey, thus preparing the way for Mr. Woodhouse's death. Moreover, the

Coles, a relatively new family, have been admitted into the first rank of Highbury society and, in giving birth to a daughter, Mrs. Weston has literally brought new life into the village.

While the emergence of the Coles reveals that, for all its tendencies towards immobility, the Highbury social machine never completely lost the ability to make necessary changes, it is, in fact, Emma Woodhouse who is mainly responsible for this resurgence of life. Through her attentions to her father, the respect that she reveals for Mr. John Knightley's ideal of domesticity, and her dignified resistance of Mrs. Elton's vulgarities, Emma demonstrates a thorough acquaintance with, and high estimation of, the gentlemanly values at work in Highbury. Indeed, unlike Frank Churchill, who continually yearns for new sensations and even plans at one stage to visit Switzerland, Emma never expresses any serious desire to extend her sphere beyond Hartfield, Donwell Abbey and Randalls.⁶ However, a society which has allowed even that formal courtship vehicle, the ball, to lapse, inevitably fails to provide sufficient scope for a young girl eager to assert herself in the world, and Emma is consequently inspired by sheer boredom to engage herself in the disruptive activities that eventually stir Highbury out of its contented lethargy. Her flirtation with Frank Churchill and their combined attempts at arranging the Crown ball are thus both instrumental in making the confirmed bachelor, Mr. Knightley, realise that he is in love with her. The first activity forces him to reassess his feelings for Emma and the second

gives him his first opportunity to approach her as something more than a sister.

However, although Emma is responsible for revitalising her community, her rebellion against Highbury society is not motivated by any real desire for change. Indeed, the direction which it takes is bound up, paradoxically, in her acceptance of the prevailing concept of Highbury as a static community. Like Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley, Emma has little desire either to extend her sphere of concern beyond the Hartfield, Donwell Abbey, Randalls circle, or to admit that this circle should be subjected to the forces of change. So conservative is Emma that she is extremely pessimistic about the consequences of any large-scale alteration in the structure of her world:

The child to be born at Randall's must be a tie there even dearer than herself; and Mrs. Weston's heart and time would be occupied by it. They should lose her; and, probably, in great measure, her husband also.--Frank Churchill would return among them no more; and Miss Fairfax, it was reasonable to suppose, would soon cease to belong to Highbury. They would be married, and settled either at or near Enscombe. All that were good would be withdrawn; and if to these losses, the loss of Donwell were to be added, what would remain of cheerful or of rational society within their reach? (422)

As this example shows, Emma's conservatism derives in part from a simple fear of change that she has probably inherited from her father. However, in contrast to either Mr. Woodhouse or Mr. Knightley, who have merely become too set in their ways, and in direct contradiction of the Highbury ideal, which she often seems to understand so well, Emma also has snobbish motives for wishing to maintain the autonomy of her own social group. This snobbish attitude does not simply manifest

itself in a sense of superiority towards those who are socially or economically inferior to herself, although this is certainly the way in which she reacts to the Coles, but it also involves a more general feeling that she is freed from her normal social obligations when dealing with anyone, regardless of rank, who does not belong to her own tiny sector of society. Emma is, thus, equally irresponsible in her dealings with both Harriet Smith and Frank Churchill. It is by erecting this artificial division between the Hartfield, Donwell Abbey, Randalls circle and the rest of the world that Emma feels justified in indulging in the irresponsible actions through which she attempts to gain relief from the tedium of Highbury life. In her dealings with the core of Highbury society, Mr. Knightley, the Westons and her father, Emma usually acts responsibly and reserves her more wilful behaviour for outsiders like Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill. Ironically, such an attitude can serve only to increase the Highbury community's tendency towards immobility. The boredom which Emma feels can be meaningfully alleviated not by the kind of improper behaviour in which she indulges herself, but by establishing a more dynamic relationship between her community and the world outside of it. She is thus grossly at fault in opposing the Coles' dinner party, the occasion upon which Mr. Cole is admitted into the first circle of Highbury society, since it is only by receiving such infusions of life from outside that any social group can hope to retain its vigour.

Emma is never, of course, completely unaware that she is behaving improperly. Thus, after the failure of her attempts to match Harriet and Mr. Elton she resolves not to interfere in her friend's life again:

The first error and the worst lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple. She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more. (136-137)

However, it is only in her dealings with the second rank of Highbury society, which includes Mrs. and Miss Bates and Mrs. Goddard, that Emma feels any consistent sense of the limitations of her approach to experience. Because even the cloistered Mr. Woodhouse includes them in his active circle of acquaintances, Emma is made very conscious at all times of the snobbish basis of her desire to exclude these ladies from her sphere of concern. Consequently, although she frequently neglects her obligation to visit Miss Bates and is sometimes rude about her in private, Emma always tries to treat her with consideration during their public encounters. However, during the Box Hill excursion, Emma finally lapses and demonstrates her snobbish sense of superiority by making Miss Bates the butt of a cruel piece of humour. This single irresponsible piece of behaviour directed at one who has such obvious links with Hartfield is sufficient to make Emma admit at last that society cannot be divided into separate compartments, but that it is a single, tightly-knit unit towards which one must adopt a consistent response. However far an individual might be from one's immediate group, he is

nevertheless an integral part of the same larger social fabric, and thus deserves to be treated with respect and consideration. Having made this essential discovery Emma is quickly able to reorientate her attitude towards Harriet Smith and towards Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax.

Like Elizabeth Bennet, who discovers that her attempt at excluding the aristocracy from her sphere of concern not only leads her into repeated improprieties but also prevents her from gauging Darcy's worth accurately, Emma finds that her refusal to treat anyone outside of her own three-house society in a responsible manner produces a total distortion of reality. Her a priori assumptions that Harriet Smith is the daughter of a gentleman, that Jane Fairfax was involved in an improper relationship with Mr. Dixon, and that Frank Churchill will turn out to be an ideal young man lead only to confusion and misunderstanding. Besides causing both Harriet and Jane Fairfax unnecessary suffering, Emma's short-sighted behaviour comes near to preventing Mr. Knightley, who believes that she is in love with Frank Churchill, from expressing his feelings for her. Thus, although Emma's self-indulgent behaviour is directed towards those from whom she feels an emotional and social detachment, its distorting effects make themselves felt in an area of intimate concern to herself. Emma finally learns that, just as the diametrically opposed approaches to experience involved in, on the one hand, paying full heed to the needs and rights of others and, on the other, manipulating the lives of those around her

towards purely personal ends cannot be reconciled morally, so they also deprive her of the ability to make accurate judgements. As in all of Jane Austen's novels, the "truth [of] human disclosure" (431) is available only to those who take full account of the complex web of circumstances at all times.

Thus, while Emma's activities are completely selfish in their origin, since they are inspired by a desire for excitement and mental stimulation, they serve eventually both to revitalise her rather static social group and to bring her to a full understanding of the Highbury ideal of existence. Her final union with Mr. Knightley, Highbury's leading citizen, is consequently emblematic both of the ability of the group to communicate its values to the individual and of the individual to introduce new energy into the group. Without this dual process Emma would never have become worthy of Mr. Knightley and he would never have been motivated to complete himself by breaking away from his contented bachelor existence and entering into matrimony.

The nature, the limitations and the consequences of Emma's dual response to society can only be fully understood if the six formal social occasions around which the novel is organised are examined.⁷ The first three, the dinner parties given by the Westons, the Coles and the Woodhouses, serve to define the inconsistencies and ironies implicit in Emma's fragmented view of experience, while the last three, the Crown ball, and the excursions to Donwell Abbey and Box Hill,

show its consequences.

Emma's belief that she is freed from her usual social obligations when dealing with anyone outside of her immediate circle is made clear initially by the contrast between her behaviour at the Randalls' dinner party and the way in which she acts throughout her attempts to unite Harriet and Mr. Elton. Thus, at the dinner party, during which she is primarily involved with Mr. Woodhouse, Mr. Knightley and Mr. Weston, Emma shows precisely the concern with, and respect for, the needs of others that is missing in her relationship with Harriet and Mr. Elton. Although the action of this section of the novel gives little immediate indication of the radical effects that Emma's manipulation of Harriet's life will eventually have on her own happiness, the way in which Mr. Elton disturbs the otherwise harmonious proceedings by pressing his attentions on her during the dinner party suggests implicitly that, by behaving irresponsibly in certain areas, the whole of her experience will inevitably be tainted.

The contrasts in behaviour established in the novel's opening section are further explored in the second during which Emma attends two dinner parties. At the first, which is given by the Coles, and which is in most ways a very proper, if rather tedious, affair, graced by the presence of Mr. Knightley and the Westons, the bored Emma deviates totally from the Highbury ideal by joining with the outsider Frank Churchill in making extremely cruel comments about Jane

Fairfax. Yet at her own party, she is inspired by the presence of Mrs. Elton, who threatens to introduce the vulgar standards of Maple Grove into Highbury life, to demonstrate a keen concern with propriety. A comparison of the two episodes serves to emphasise that, while Emma's rebellion against her society reveals serious flaws in her understanding of the Highbury ideal of respect for others, it does not imply any real desire to break away from her community, but is rather motivated by a sense of boredom at the tedious predictability of her everyday existence. When faced with a challenge to her world and its way of life, Emma quickly asserts its value.

Up to this point, Emma has succeeded in keeping the two aspects of her dual response to society separate. However, the events of the next three formal social occasions show very clearly that each part of the individual's experience inevitably reflects on the others. Both the Crown ball and the Donwell Abbey excursion serve on the whole to vindicate the Highbury ideal of existence and Emma's part in it. Emma herself behaves very properly on both occasions and is increasingly drawn towards Mr. Knightley. Thus, during the Crown ball she shares his indignation at Mr. Elton's rudeness to Harriet and gladly accepts his offer to dance, and in the course of the excursion to Donwell Abbey shows a deep admiration for his home and for the solid virtues that it symbolises. However, in the very moments when it begins to appear inevitable that Emma and Mr. Knightley will progress smoothly towards marriage, the ill effects of her perverse attempts at

altering Harriet's rank in society also begin to make themselves felt. By dancing with her at the Crown ball and by singling her out during the Donwell Abbey excursion, Mr. Knightley inadvertently succeeds first of all in making Harriet fall in love with him and, then, in convincing her that he is also in love with her. It is, of course, entirely because Emma has given her an elevated sense of her own consequence that Harriet is induced to place a romantic interpretation on Mr. Knightley's actions. Although her secret affection has no effect whatsoever on Mr. Knightley, Harriet does succeed briefly in convincing Emma that her feelings are reciprocated, and thus makes her friend painfully aware of the possible consequences of failing to behave responsibly in all situations. In the moments during which she believes that, because of her own foolish and selfish actions, Harriet Smith has acquired the necessary sense of self-importance not only to entice Highbury's leading citizen into a socially disastrous marriage but also to deprive her of a man whom she suddenly realises she loves, Emma suffers a deserved punishment for all the pain that she has caused others. Although the implications of Emma's perverse activities are not completely worked out until Harriet makes her startling claims, the crucial moment of self-realisation occurs earlier during the trip to Box Hill. By behaving rudely towards Miss Bates, a woman whose claims to consideration are indisputable, Emma is made acutely aware that the two halves of her divided response to experience cannot be kept separate. The

succeeding action, during which Emma is forced to suffer brief periods of purgatory for her offences against Miss Bates, Jane Fairfax and Harriet, before finally being united with Mr. Knightley, follows inevitably from this moment.

By relying to such a large extent on the formal social occasion to carry the burden of her action Jane Austen is able to establish a very strong sense of the background of communal values in relation to which Emma is seeking to define herself. With the exception of the trip to Box Hill, which takes place outside of the village, each group function is characterised by a sense of harmony that not even Emma is able to destroy completely. Thus, in contrast to Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice, in which the heroines in achieving maturity transcend and eventually move away from their original social group, and to Mansfield Park, in which Fanny is faced with the task of restoring the moral health of the ailing Bertram family, it seems inevitable throughout Emma that, once Emma has fully tested and reaffirmed its values, she will be able to settle back comfortably into the existing community. Emma thus adheres even more closely to the final stage of the separation, transition, incorporation pattern of the rites of passage than do any of Jane Austen's other novels.

Although much of the action of the Randalls' dinner party seems to bear little direct relevance to the match-making enterprise in which Emma is mainly engaged during the first part of the novel, the full significance of the section

cannot be properly comprehended unless this scene is taken into account. Throughout her attempts to unite Harriet and Mr. Elton, Emma seems to be completely at odds with her social group, and Mr. Knightley, who personifies the Highbury ideal of existence, thoroughly reprimands her every action. The full complexities of her response to the world around her do not become apparent, however, until she demonstrates, by her behaviour at Randalls, that she also has a very deep respect for the values against which she has been so grossly offending. A comparison of the main action with the single episode thus serves to establish that, while Emma is in some ways a fully responsible member of her community, a desire for novelty and excitement often motivates her to behave with a complete lack of either judgement or consideration in her relationships with those outside of her immediate area of concern.

In order to understand exactly how the Randalls dinner party completes the meaning of the novel's first section it is necessary to examine first of all the conflict that is established between Emma and her society throughout the rest of the action. Life in Highbury, as G. Armour Craig points out, is so well regulated that one of the few ways in which Emma can create new and exciting situations for herself is by tangling the complicated, but precise, "web of imputations" that comprises rank.⁸ Thus, when the marriage of Miss Taylor forces her to look beyond the confines of Hartfield for intellectual stimulation, Emma seizes upon Harriet Smith

whose main attraction is her illegitimacy. Lacking any sure knowledge of Harriet's parentage, Emma believes herself to be at liberty to place her anywhere on the social scale that she wishes. In arriving at this assumption Emma is acting in direct contradiction to the standards of her community since, as Mr. Knightley affirms, the very fact of her illegitimacy makes it easy to establish Harriet's social position:

"Not Harriet's equal!" exclaimed Mr. Knightley loudly and warmly; and with calmer asperity, added, a few moments afterwards, "No, he is not her equal indeed, for he is as much her superior in sense as in situation. Emma, your infatuation about that girl blinds you. What are Harriet Smith's claims, either of birth, nature or education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin? She is the natural daughter of nobody knows whom, with probably no settled provision at all, and certainly no respectable relations." (61)

However, Emma is so enamoured of the idea of shaping Harriet's life according to her own preconceptions that she refuses to heed any such considerations. Instead, she not only convinces her protégée that she is a gentleman's daughter, but she also sets out to find her a suitable attachment. The first problem facing Emma is that Harriet already has a suitor appropriate to her real situation in life. Her good nature and pleasing manners fit her perfectly for the attentions of a young man like Robert Martin who has enough money not to be troubled by her lack of wealth and a sufficiently low social position not to be over-concerned about her illegitimacy. Since such a simple solution to Harriet's matrimonial problems would leave no scope for her match-making activities, Emma endeavours to prove to her friend that she is Robert Martin's superior. In trying to denigrate Robert Martin's

respectable yeoman position, Emma becomes involved in a complex and perverse process of self-deceit. Instead of judging him according to criteria relevant to a man in his station in life, Emma deliberately gauges him against standards properly applicable only to a refined gentleman. Thus, when Harriet becomes too enthusiastic in her description of what were obviously extremely kind attentions paid her by Robert Martin, Emma tries to diminish the favourable impression that he has created by enquiring sourly about the extent of his reading. Even after Robert Martin has made his appearance and conducted himself in an extremely polite and proper manner, Emma insists on judging him in relation to the very highest reaches of Highbury society:

"He is very plain, undoubtedly--remarkably plain:--but that is nothing, compared with his entire want of gentility. I had no right to expect much, and I did not expect much; but I had no idea that he could be so very clownish, so totally without air. I had imagined him, I confess, a degree or two nearer gentility."

"To be sure," said Harriet, in a mortified voice, "he is not so genteel as real gentlemen."

"I think, Harriet, since your acquaintance with us, you have been repeatedly in the company of some, such very real gentlemen, that you must yourself be struck with the difference in Mr. Martin. At Hartfield you have had very good specimens of well educated, well bred men." (32)

Mr. Knightley's comments on Robert Martin's manners serve once again to underline the perversity of Emma's attitude:

"Robert Martin's manners have sense, sincerity, and good-humour to recommend them; and his mind has more true gentility than Harriet Smith could understand." (65)

Emma's response to Robert Martin is so unjust that, finally, when she can find nothing objectionable in his letter of proposal to Harriet she argues that it must have been written

by his sister.

The gap between Emma's idiosyncratic response to experience and normal rational standards, which is established explicitly by Mr. Knightley's intermittent comments, is reinforced implicitly by two metaphors of measuring. Thus, just as he literally measured Harriet's height in relation to the rest of his family, so Robert Martin gauged her worth in relation to his own before presuming to propose marriage:

In that very room she had been measured last September, with her two friends. There were the pencilled marks and memorandum on the wainscot by the window. He had done it. (187)

Emma, on the other hand, has paid little attention to the realities of Harriet's situation and, in the same way that she increased her friend's height in her sketch so, in evaluating her social position, she has arbitrarily improved the quality of her birth:

The sitting was altogether very satisfactory; she was quite enough pleased with the first day's sketch to wish to go on. There was no want of likeness, she had been fortunate in the attitude, and as she meant to throw in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance, she had great confidence of its being in every way a pretty drawing at last. (47)

After successfully diverting Harriet's affections away from Robert Martin, Emma next turns her attention to the no less ridiculous enterprise of making a match with the ambitious clergyman, Elton. Again she acts in direct contradiction to the advice of Mr. Knightley, the voice of Highbury wisdom, who tells her in no uncertain terms of the unbridgeable gap that exists between Harriet and Elton:

"Depend upon it, Elton will not do. Elton is a very good sort of man, and a very respectable vicar of Highbury, but not at all likely to make an imprudent match. He knows the value of a good income as well as anybody. . . . I have heard

him speak with great animation of a large family of young ladies that his sisters are intimate with, who have all twenty thousand pounds apiece." (66)

Working, as she is, according to completely artificial criteria, Emma succeeds only in convincing Mr. Elton that she has serious intentions towards him herself. All the apparent attentions that he pays to Harriet turn out to have been intended as compliments to Emma. Thus, in praising Emma's drawing of Harriet he is in fact concerned with commending the artist on her skill rather than the subject on her beauty. The whole relationship between Elton and Harriet eventually proves to have been nothing more than a figment of Emma's imagination, having no more substance than Elton's "Courtship" charade. Although Elton offends Emma greatly by making his sudden declaration of love, his conduct is in many ways far less ridiculous than is hers in trying to elevate Harriet's status. Whereas Emma totally ignored her own society's dictates about the importance of birth and wealth in trying to redefine Harriet's rank, Mr. Elton's actions at least derived from a consistent approach to experience. Coming, as he does, from a world beyond the boundaries of Highbury, Mr. Elton judges marital eligibility in strictly financial terms and therefore considers an heiress of £30,000 a fair target for his attentions.

If Emma's irresponsible attempts to manipulate Harriet's fortunes and her apparently naïve failure to comprehend her true station in life are contrasted with her behaviour at the Randalls' dinner party, during which she shows a

deep concern for the unique existence of others and a keen ability to gauge the needs of the situation, it becomes obvious that her faults result from a partial lack of perspective rather than complete moral ignorance. Thus, in the moments immediately prior to the embarrassing ^rtête-à-tête carriage ride with Elton, during which the full implications of her actions are revealed, Emma's conduct is on a par with Mr. Knightley's. Whereas Mr. Weston, by concealing his knowledge of the inclement weather in order that his party might not be broken up early, and Mr. John Knightley, by maliciously exaggerating the violence of the snow-storm, are both negligent of their duty towards Mr. Woodhouse, the aging patriarch of Highbury society, Emma and Mr. Knightley make him the first object of their attention and strive to allay his childish fears. The manner in which they instantly concur upon the best course of action to be taken when even Mr. Knightley's assurances about the weather fail to reconcile Mr. Woodhouse to remaining at the party is indicative of an extremely close understanding of the kind that can arise only out of a shared system of priorities:

He was satisfied of there being no present danger in returning home, but no assurances could convince him that it was safe to stay; and while the others were variously urging and recommending, Mr. Knightley and Emma settled it in a few brief sentences: thus--

"Your father will not be easy; why do not you go?"

"I am ready, if the others are."

"Shall I ring the bell?"

"Yes, do." (128)

It becomes clear from this incident that Emma feels a need to behave correctly only in her dealings with those, such as Mr.

Woodhouse, who stand very close to the centre of her world.

Emma herself fails to recognise the basic contradictions implicit in her attitude to the world around her even after it has become obvious to her that she has cruelly mistreated Harriet. However, the discordant note introduced into the otherwise pleasurable dinner party by Mr. Elton, who begins to demonstrate matrimonial intentions towards Emma, suggests to the reader that the results of her selfish actions will eventually make themselves felt even in those areas in which she has always behaved with complete propriety. Thus, early in the evening, Mr. Elton's annoying attentions prevent Emma from fully involving herself with her friends and from listening to Mr. Weston's news about Frank Churchill:

Emma's project of forgetting Mr. Elton for a while, made her rather sorry to find, when they had all taken their places, that he was close to her. The difficulty was great of driving his strange insensibility towards Harriet, from her mind, while he not only sat at her elbow, but was continually obtruding his happy countenance on her notice, and solicitously addressing her upon every occasion. . . . For her own sake she could not be rude; and for Harriet's, in the hope that all would yet turn out right, she was even positively civil; but it was an effort; especially as something was going on amongst the others, in the most overpowering period of Mr. Elton's nonsense, which she particularly wished to listen to. She heard enough to know that Mr. Weston was giving some information about his son . . . ; but before she could quiet Mr. Elton, the subject was so completely past that any reviving question from her would have been awkward. (118)

Although Emma is "happily released from Mr. Elton" (119) during dinner and is consequently able to enjoy a pleasant conversation with Mr. Weston, she is once again assailed by him almost immediately after the guests have moved into the drawing room. The dangers inherent in Emma's irresponsible attitude to those outside of the Hartfield, Donwell Abbey,

Randalls circle are epitomised by the highly symbolical manner in which Mr. Elton pushes his way onto the sofa and, after isolating her from her world, as represented by Mrs. Weston, completely destroys her sense of pleasurable repose by indicating that she, and not Harriet, is the real object of his affections:

Mr. Elton, in very good spirits, was one of the first to walk in. Mrs. Weston and Emma were sitting together on a sofa. He joined them immediately, and with scarcely an invitation, seated himself between them.

Emma, in good spirits too, from the amusement afforded her mind by the expectation of Mr. Frank Churchill, was willing to forget his late improprieties, and be as well satisfied with him as before, and on his making Harriet his very first subject, was ready to listen with most friendly smiles.

He professed himself extremely anxious about her fair friend--her fair, lovely, amiable friend. . . .

But at last there seemed a perverse turn; it seemed all at once as if he were more afraid of its being a bad sore throat on her account, than on Harriet's--more anxious that she should escape the infection, than that there should be no infection in the complaint. . . . She was vexed. It did appear--there was no concealing it--exactly like the pretence of being in love with her, instead of Harriet; an inconstancy, if real, the most contemptible and abominable! and she had difficulty in behaving with temper. (124-125)

The contradictions implicit in Emma's dual response to society become even more apparent in the novel's second section during which she is faced with two very different intruders into the Highbury world, Frank Churchill and Mrs. Elton. In her dealings with Frank Churchill, who merely presents an exciting and romantic alternative to the predictability of her everyday life, Emma demonstrates the same selfishly individualistic lack of concern for others that characterised her attempts at matching Harriet and Elton. Yet, when faced with Mrs. Elton, who threatens to soil the purity of Highbury life by introducing the vulgar standards of Maple

Grove, Emma behaves with propriety and decorum. As in the first part of the novel, so the implications of the second cannot be grasped properly unless a comparison is made of the way in which Emma conducts herself on two different and apparently unconnected occasions. Thus, at the Coles' dinner party, Emma is so influenced by Frank Churchill's presence that she offends seriously against the standards of her community, while at the Hartfield party, during which she is concerned with combatting Mrs. Elton's disruptive influence, she behaves impeccably.

The very fact that the Coles' dinner party takes place and is attended by such village notables as Mr. Knightley and the Westons shows that, despite its tendency towards immobility, Highbury society has not totally lost its ability to make necessary changes. Having made a fortune in trade and having spent several years acquiring gentility and establishing his reputation in the community, Mr. Cole at last asserts his right to be considered worthy of full social intercourse with the very best families in Highbury by inviting the Woodhouses, Mr. Knightley and the Westons to dinner. The justice of Mr. Cole's implicit claim that he is morally, as well as economically, the equal of gentlefolk such as these is demonstrated very clearly by the fact that he shows a proper concern for Mr. Woodhouse by including a detailed description of his plans for securing the old man's comfort in the invitation to the Hartfield family:

The Coles expressed themselves so properly--there was so much real attention in the manner of it--so much consideration for

her father. "They would have solicited the honour earlier, but had been waiting the arrival of a folding-screen from London, which they hoped might keep Mr. Woodhouse from any draught of air, and therefore induce him the more readily to give them the honour of his company." (208)

Although Mr. Woodhouse does not attend the party, he joins with Mr. Knightley and Mr. Weston in agreeing to the propriety of the Coles' invitation and resolves that they shall be invited to call at Hartfield for tea during the Summer. Only Emma considers the Coles to be presumptuous and thus demonstrates once again a snobbish sense of the superiority of her own small group. The static conception of society implicit in her response to Harriet, Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax very obviously underlies her attitude to the Coles. Thus, although Emma's refusal to recognise the justice of the Coles' claim to consideration has few ramifications in the novel's later action, it serves to emphasise the broader social implications of her personal failings. Since her deviations from the standards of the community are bound up in an aversion to change, it is inevitable that, until she comes to realise that Highbury society has become boring because of its tendency towards immobility, and that the rise of the Coles is thus a process to be encouraged, Emma will continue to behave in such a way as to propagate the situation which lies at the source of her discontent. In finally accepting the Coles' invitation, Emma is not motivated by any true realisation of the snobbish basis of her original objections but by the prospect of renewed intercourse with her interesting new acquaintance, Frank Churchill. Although she claims that she changed her mind because of the extremely proper terms in which the letter to Hartfield was couched, her resolution "to be very happy, in spite of the

scene being laid at Mr. Cole's" (213), her behaviour during the party, and her supercilious retrospective reflection that she "did not repent her condescension in going to the Coles" (231) prove quite decisively that she still considers them her inferiors.

The events of the evening in no way justify Emma's attitude to the Coles. The people with whom she is asked to dine are all totally unexceptionable since, in addition to her own friends, the guest-list is comprised of a "proper unobjectionable country family" (214) and the male part of the family of Mr. Cox, the Highbury lawyer. When the lesser worthies are admitted after dinner, they make their entry very properly "in their different divisions" (219), and the dinner itself is conducted with an extremely strict, if slightly tedious, regard for correct form:

They were called on to share in the awkwardness of a rather long interval between the courses, and obliged to be as formal and as orderly as the others; but when the table was again safely covered, when every corner dish was placed exactly right, and occupation and ease were generally restored. . . . (218)

It is only in their rather self-conscious concern with the polite externals of social intercourse, and in the newness of the piano upon which their daughters are to learn some of the accomplishments of gentlewomen, that the Coles' trading background shows through the surface of genteel respectability.

Mr. Knightley, as ever, adds to the dignity of the proceedings by acting in a manner reflective of the very highest standards of Highbury society. By thinking to provide

a carriage for the Bates' household he proves himself to be a gentleman in a much fuller sense than Emma had suspected when she rather snobbishly congratulated him for travelling in a manner befitting the owner of Donwell Abbey:

She followed another carriage to Mr. Cole's door; and was pleased to see that it was Mr. Knightley's; for Mr. Knightley keeping no horses, having little spare money and a great deal of health, activity, and independence, was too apt, in Emma's opinion, to get about as he could, and not use his carriage so often as became the owner of Donwell Abbey. She had an opportunity now of speaking her approbation while warm from her heart, for he stopped to hand her out.

"This is coming as you should do," said she, "like a gentleman.--I am quite glad to see you." (213)

He reveals a similar concern for others later in the evening by intervening to prevent Frank Churchill from pressing the obviously tired Jane Fairfax into further singing:

Towards the end of Jane's second song, her voice grew thick.

"That will do," said he, when it was finished, thinking aloud--"You have sung quite enough for one evening --now, be quiet."

Another song, however, was soon begged for. "One more;--they would not fatigue Miss Fairfax on any account, and would only ask for one more." And Frank Churchill was heard to say, "I think you could manage this without effort; the first part is so very trifling. The strength of the song falls on the second."

Mr. Knightley grew angry.

"That fellow," said he, indignantly, "thinks of nothing but shewing off his own voice. This must not be." And touching Miss Bates, who at that moment passed near--"Miss Bates, are you mad, to let your niece sing herself hoarse in this manner? Go, and interfere. They have no mercy on her." (229)

Instead of being inspired by the overall propriety of the proceedings to act responsibly, Emma merely becomes extremely bored by the staid nature of the evening's formal activities. She thus finds the dinner-table conversation nothing more than a stale repetition of many others that she

has been forced to endure in the past:

She said no more, other subjects took their turn; and the rest of the dinner passed away; the dessert succeeded, the children came in, and were talked to and admired amid the usual rate of conversation; a few clever things said, a few downright silly, but by much the larger proportion neither the one nor the other--nothing worse than every day remarks, dull repetitions, old news, and heavy jokes. (219)

Just as she turned to Harriet Smith for relief from the general monotony of Highbury life so, on this occasion, Emma involves herself extremely improperly with Frank Churchill. In her conversations with him both before and during dinner, Emma allows herself to be induced into voicing her scandalous suspicions about Jane Fairfax's relationship with Mr. Dixon. Although Frank Churchill behaves inexcusably in leading her astray simply to divert any possible suspicion from his own secret engagement to Jane Fairfax, Emma's completely groundless hypothesis that the piano which had recently arrived at the Bates' household was sent by Mr. Dixon reflects no more credit on her than did her earlier fantasies about Harriet's parentage:

"If Col. Campbell is not the person, who can be?"

"What do you say to Mrs. Dixon?"

"Mrs. Dixon! very true indeed. I had not thought of Mrs. Dixon. She must know as well as her father, how acceptable an instrument would be; and perhaps the mode of it, the mystery, the surprize, is more like a young woman's scheme than an elderly man's. It is Mrs. Dixon I dare say. I told you that your suspicions would guide mine."

"If so, you must extend your suspicions and comprehend Mr. Dixon in them." (216-217)

Two other brief incidents during the same party serve to re-emphasise both the reasons why Emma is dissatisfied with her community and why she expresses this dissatisfaction by behaving irresponsibly in her relationships with outsiders

like Harriet and Frank Churchill. When a brief interlude of dancing finally enlivens the evening, Mr. Knightley pointedly stands aside and thus underlines the general lack of vitality which has made not only this particular dinner party, but also Highbury life in general, so frustrating for Emma. As a young woman in the process of making her entry into the adult world, Emma needs the opportunities for finding new partners and eventually a husband offered by the dance, which serves as a courtship ritual in Jane Austen's novels. Yet, by his reaction on this occasion, Mr. Knightley, the effective leader of Highbury society, makes it clear that the community is unwilling to offer her such opportunities. Emma is, of course, unaware of the source of her discontent and is, indeed, in many ways, a bigger enemy of change than either Mr. Knightley or Mr. Woodhouse. Thus, when Mrs. Weston suggests, at one point in the evening, that Mr. Knightley might marry Jane Fairfax, Emma reacts with an intense hostility that is caused not only by her own unconscious affection for him, but also by an aversion to anything that might alter her existing way of life:

"Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax!" exclaimed Emma. "Dear Mrs. Weston, how could you think of such a thing?--Mr. Knightley! --Mr. Knightley must not marry!--You would not have little Henry cut out from Donwell?--Oh! no, no, Henry must have Donwell. I cannot at all consent to Mr. Knightley's marrying." (224)

If such apparently minor incidents are granted their full weight, the reader is able to emerge from this scene with a much greater sense of sympathy for Emma than her actions might seem to justify. Despite the confidence with

which she approaches experience, Emma is very clearly an immature young woman incapable of dealing with all the complexities of the world around her. Thus, her irresponsible manipulation of the lives of outsiders like Harriet and Frank Churchill does not derive from the workings of an essentially vicious personality, but from an attempt to dispel a sense of dissatisfaction, the source of which she does not truly understand.

Emma reacts very differently to Mrs. Elton, the next intruder into Highbury society, than she did to Frank Churchill. Whereas the latter merely presented her with an opportunity to escape the sometimes suffocating demands of propriety, the former offers a direct challenge to the Highbury way of life. Seizing upon the privilege extended to her as a bride of being first in company, Mrs. Elton tries continually to take over the leadership of the community and consequently to introduce the standards of Maple Grove into Highbury. Both her social pretensions and her faults become obvious to Emma during their first meeting at Hartfield:

. . . she had a quarter of an hour of the lady's conversation to herself, and could composedly attend to her; and the quarter of an hour quite convinced her that Mrs. Elton was a vain woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance; that she meant to shine and be very superior, but with manners which had been formed in a bad school, pert and familiar; that all her notions were drawn from one set of people, and one style of living; that if not foolish she was ignorant, and that her society would certainly do Mr. Elton no good. (272)

So convinced is Mrs. Elton of her own importance that in the course of this encounter she offers to give Emma an introduction into Bath society and presumes to address the paragon of

all Highbury virtues by the familiar title of "Knightley."

Emma thus finds herself for the first time defending an ideal of order and propriety, the importance of which she has so many times underrated herself, against a vulgar bourgeois intrusion. So attentive does she become to her social duty that she suppresses all feelings of personal dislike and hastens to pay the respects due to Mrs. Elton, as the bride of the Highbury clergyman, by giving a dinner party in her honour:

Emma, in the meanwhile, could not be satisfied without a dinner at Hartfield for the Eltons. They must not do less than others, or she should be exposed to odious suspicions, and imagined capable of pitiful resentment. A dinner there must be. (290-291)

As the anxieties that she suffers about the guest-list reveal, Emma is acutely concerned that the Hartfield dinner party be conducted as properly as possible. Thus, although only her closest friends are invited to meet Mrs. Elton, Emma is worried first of all by the possibility of an embarrassing encounter between Harriet and Mr. Elton and then by the prospect of the party becoming too crowded for Mr. Woodhouse's comfort when the unexpected arrival of Mr. John Knightley necessitates an expansion of the guest list. The sense of relief that she feels when these problems are solved by Harriet's tactful decision to refuse her invitation and by Mr. Weston's enforced absence, emphasises that Emma is approaching her own dinner party in a very different spirit than she did the Coles'. During the party itself, Emma is so attentive to the quality of her own behaviour that even

when an opportune moment arises for passing a comment about Mr. Dixon, she is for once able to restrain herself:

Jane's solicitude about fetching her own letters had not escaped Emma. She had heard and seen it all; and felt some curiosity to know whether the wet walk of this morning had produced any. She suspected that it had; that it would not have been so resolutely encountered but in full expectation of hearing from some one very dear, and that it had not been in vain. She thought there was an air of greater happiness than usual--a glow both of complexion and spirits.

She could have made an inquiry or two, as to the expedition and the expense of the Irish mails;--it was at her tongue's end--but she abstained. She was quite determined not to utter a word that should hurt Jane Fairfax's feelings. (298)

In many ways, Emma's attempts to ensure the success of the evening are fruitful. "The kind-hearted, polite old man," Mr. Woodhouse, sets the tone of the proceedings by making "every fair lady welcome and easy" (295); Mr. John Knightley displays none of the anticipated irritation at being forced to engage himself with a large party, but rather finds pleasure in talking to Jane Fairfax; the otherwise rather subdued Mr. Knightley enjoys a bantering conversation with Emma about the widening of her circle of acquaintance; and Mrs. Weston behaves in her usual considerate and friendly manner. Thus, although, as at the Coles' dinner party, the improper behaviour of one guest is sufficient to introduce a discordant note into the proceedings, on this occasion, it is Mrs. Elton and not Emma who offends against the Highbury ideal.

In order to emphasise the radical change in her heroine's attitude, which has taken her from a position morally outside of her group to one at its centre, Jane Austen

draws some disturbing parallels between Mrs. Elton's conduct at Hartfield and Emma's during the Coles' party and during her attempts to match Harriet and Mr. Elton. Mrs. Elton makes herself particularly objectionable during her conversations with Jane Fairfax. Thus, early in the evening, while Mrs. Weston and Mr. John Knightley are content to express their concern for Jane Fairfax's health when it emerges that she has been caught in the rain during her daily visit to the post office, Mrs. Elton persists in making extremely unwelcome offers of help. So concerned is she with displaying her bounteous nature and with boasting of the superfluity of her servants that she completely fails to notice that she is causing Jane Fairfax acute distress:

"Oh! She shall not do such a thing again," eagerly rejoined Mrs. Elton. "We will not allow her to do such a thing again:"--and nodding significantly--"there must be some arrangement made, there must indeed. I shall speak to Mr. E. The man who fetches our letters every morning (one of our men, I forget his name) shall inquire for your's too and bring them to you. . . ."

"You are extremely kind," said Jane; "but I cannot give up my early walk. . . ."

"My dear Jane, say no more about it. The thing is determined, that is (laughing affectedly) as far as I can presume to determine any thing without the concurrence of my lord and master. . . ."

"Excuse me," said Jane earnestly, "I cannot by any means consent to such an arrangement, so needlessly troublesome to your servant." (295-296)

Later, she shows even less tact by pressing Jane Fairfax on the awkward subject of her future employment:

"Col. and Mrs. Campbell are to be in town again by mid-summer," said Jane. "I must spend some time with them; I am sure they will want it;--afterwards I may probably be glad to dispose of myself. But I would not wish you to take the trouble of making any inquiries at present."

"Trouble! aye, I know your scruples. You are afraid of giving me trouble; but I assure you, my dear Jane, the

Campbells can hardly be more interested about you than I am. I shall write to Mrs. Partridge in a day or two, and shall give her a strict charge to be on the look-out for any thing eligible."

"Thank you, but I would rather you did not mention the subject to her; till the time draws nearer, I do not wish to be giving any body trouble."

"But, my dear child, the time is drawing near; here is April, and June, or say even July, is very near, with such business to accomplish before us." (300)

The lack of respect for the unique existence of others implicit in each of these attempts to interfere in Jane Fairfax's personal affairs is, of course, very similar to that displayed by Emma in presuming that she has the right to invent an irregular relationship between Jane Fairfax and Mr. Dixon and to manipulate Harriet's rank in order to provide herself with a source of entertainment.

It becomes obvious from her loudly voiced assumption that she will be asked to lead the way into dinner that, like Emma, Mrs. Elton bases her right to interfere in the lives of others on an unjustified and snobbish sense of social sovereignty:

Dinner was on table.--Mrs. Elton, before she could be spoken to, was ready; and before Mr. Woodhouse had reached her with his request to be allowed to hand her into the dining-parlour, was saying--

"Must I go first? I really am ashamed of always leading the way." (298)

This sense of superiority derives in both Mrs. Elton's and Emma's cases from a failure to grant any importance to the world outside of their own small areas of concern. Thus, Mrs. Elton's ridiculous attempts at judging everything in terms of Maple Grove are basically no more foolish than Emma's inability to see beyond the confines of the Hartfield,

Donwell Abbey, Randalls circle:

"Indeed!--from Yorkshire, I think. Enscombe is in Yorkshire?"

"Yes, they are about 190 miles from London. A considerable journey."

"Yes, upon my word, very considerable. Sixty-five miles farther than from Maple Grove to London." (305-306)

At another point in the evening, Emma is extremely offended by the rude manner in which Mrs. Elton divides the party into exclusive factions by annexing Jane Fairfax's attention and neglecting her obligations towards the other guests:

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room after dinner, Emma found it hardly possible to prevent their making two distinct parties;--with so much perseverance in judging and behaving ill did Mrs. Elton engross Jane Fairfax and slight herself. She and Mrs. Weston were obliged to be almost always either talking together or silent together. Mrs. Elton left them no choice. (299)

Yet, by engaging herself in a private conversation with Frank Churchill, the content of which would have been offensive to the other guests had they been allowed to overhear it, Emma was equally guilty during the Coles' party of subordinating her duty to further group harmony to a desire for personal gratification.

The crucial difference between Emma and Mrs. Elton is, of course, that, although her view of the world around her is a limited one, Emma has had the benefit of a sound moral training, while Mrs. Elton derives from a completely vulgar environment. Thus, Mrs. Elton's faults would become even more apparent if she were viewed within the context of Maple Grove, whereas Emma can behave excellently, as she does on this occasion, when she is not tempted to stray beyond the

moral confines of Highbury. Nevertheless, the similarities do exist, and so long as she continues to fragment her approach to experience in such a way that it is possible to draw comparisons between herself and Mrs. Elton, Emma cannot hope to be considered either a mature adult or a worthy member of her social group.

At this point in the action Jane Austen has fully established the limitations both of her heroine and of the world in which she is situated and is now ready to begin the process that culminates in the complete restoration of harmony between Emma and her group that is symbolised by her marriage to Mr. Knightley. As in the first half of the novel so, in the second, the burden of the action is carried by three formal social occasions, the Crown ball and the excursions to Donwell Abbey and Box Hill. During the Crown ball and the outing to Donwell Abbey, Emma begins to feel a renewed sense of attraction to a community which, as is shown by the very fact that these two group activities take place in rapid succession, is gradually being shaken out of its contented lethargy by the disruptive influences introduced by herself and by outsiders such as Frank Churchill and Mrs. Elton. She finds so much to enjoy on both of these occasions that even the presence of Frank Churchill is not sufficient to lead her away from the paths of propriety. Instead, she begins to draw noticeably closer to her old friend, Mr. Knightley. However, before Emma can become worthy of Highbury's leading citizen it is imperative that she be made

aware of the limitations of her dual response to society. It is thus singularly appropriate that at the same time as Emma begins to feel the full value of Highbury society, the chain of events which is eventually to bring her to complete self-realisation should be set in motion. By behaving kindly towards Harriet during the ball and at Donwell Abbey, Mr. Knightley inadvertently makes her fall in love with him and thus prepares the way for the climactic moment in which Emma is made to believe that, because of her irresponsible behaviour, she has lost to her friend the man whom she suddenly realises that she loves herself. Although this episode serves to complete the cycle of events which began approximately nine months before when she tried to enliven the dull period following Miss Taylor's marriage by engaging in a harmless piece of match-making, Emma is actually first made aware of her faults during the novel's last formal social occasion, the Box Hill excursion. This short episode serves to sum up the basic situation with which Emma has been grappling throughout the novel. Thus, Highbury society, in spite of its recent improvements, is at its most tedious and frustrating and Emma, still unaware of the real source of her dissatisfaction, seeks amusement by behaving improperly with the outsider, Frank Churchill. However, on this occasion she loses all sense of proportion and finally insults Miss Bates, one of the closest friends of both Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley. Such a concrete demonstration of the manner in which the effects of her irresponsible approach to certain

aspects of her experience can make themselves felt in areas of obvious concern to herself is sufficient to make Emma completely re-appraise her attitude to the world around her.

The near immobility of the Highbury world is epitomised by the difficulties which Frank Churchill and Emma are forced to overcome before the lapsed custom of balls at the Crown can be revived. Mr. Woodhouse, of course, objects on grounds of health to the idea of opening up the long disused Crown ballroom; Mrs. Weston is concerned at the lack of supper facilities; and Mr. Knightley expresses a bad-tempered aversion to the plan because it would disturb his well-regulated pattern of existence:

"Very well. If the Westons think it worth while to be at all this trouble for a few hours of noisy entertainment, I have nothing to say against it, but that they shall not choose pleasures for me.--Oh! yes, I must be there; I could not refuse; and I will keep as much awake as I can; but I would rather be at home, looking over William Larkins's week's account; much rather, I confess.--Pleasure in seeing dancing! --not I, indeed." (257)

Eventually, however, all the problems are solved and a very proper ball, including the sit-down supper, which is universally declared to be necessary to "the rights of men and women" (254), is arranged. Although it is delayed for a while by the recall of Frank Churchill to Enscombe, the ball eventually takes place as planned and thus marks an important stage in the rejuvenation of Highbury life. Its overall success is summed up thus:

The ball proceeded pleasantly. The anxious cares, the incessant attentions of Mrs. Weston, were not thrown away. Every body seemed happy; and the praise of being a delightful ball, which is seldom bestowed till after a ball has ceased to be, was repeatedly given in the very beginning of

the existence of this. (326)

So stimulated is Emma by the idea of a Highbury ball that, on this occasion, she feels no need to stray beyond the moral confines of her own small group. Indeed, so strict is she in her moral evaluations of others that it becomes increasingly obvious during the evening that only Mr. Knightley, the paragon of all Highbury virtues, can match up to the standards that Emma is capable of setting herself. Thus, in the course of criticising Mr. Weston for the indiscriminate sociability that has motivated him to include far too many people in the supposedly exclusive group invited to inspect the room at the Crown before the official start of the ball, Emma invokes an ideal that fits no-one so perfectly as Mr. Knightley:

Emma perceived that her taste was not the only taste on which Mr. Weston depended, and felt, that to be the favourite and intimate of a man who had so many intimates and confidantes, was not the very first distinction in the scale of vanity. She liked his open manners, but a little less of open-heartedness would have made him a higher character.--General benevolence, but not general friendship, made a man what he ought to be.--She could fancy such a man. (319-320)

This unconscious movement towards Mr. Knightley assumes more concrete proportions later in the evening when she watches with admiration as he rescues Harriet Smith from an extremely embarrassing and painful situation. Noticing that Mr. Elton, encouraged by his wife, is trying to humiliate Harriet by blatantly avoiding dancing with her, Mr. Knightley tears himself away from his accustomed position amongst the ranks of the "husbands, fathers and whist-players" (325) and engages her himself.

Emma's increasing esteem for Mr. Knightley and his rapidly emerging love for her are both evident during their next conversation, in the course of which she generously admits the blame that should be attached to herself for trying to make a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton and he reveals that, although he strongly disapproves of the "vain spirit" which inspires such irresponsible activities, he is very conscious that she also possesses a "serious spirit" which can help to correct her errors:

"I shall not scold you. I leave you to your own reflections."

"Can you trust me with such flatterers?--Does my vain spirit ever tell me I am wrong?"

"Not your vain spirit, but your serious spirit.--If one leads you wrong, I am sure the other tells you of it."

"I do own myself to have been completely mistaken in Mr. Elton. There is a littleness about him which you discovered, and which I did not: and I was fully convinced of his being in love with Harriet. It was through a series of strange blunders!" (330-331)

This extremely friendly discussion is terminated auspiciously when Mr. Knightley makes the first decisive demonstration of his still concealed affection by asking Emma to dance:

"Whom are you going to dance with?" asked Mr. Knightley.

She hesitated a moment, and then replied, "With you, if you will ask me."

"Will you?" said he, offering his hand.

"Indeed I will. You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper."

"Brother and sister! no, indeed." (331)

Emma reveals such an affinity with Mr. Knightley during the Crown ball that it seems inevitable that, just as he has won her away on this occasion from Frank Churchill, with whom she opened the ball, so he will eventually be able to draw her

back into the Highbury community and, by marrying her, make the temporary union formed by dancing into a permanent one.

Unfortunately, despite Mr. Knightley's confidence in the ability of her "serious spirit" to correct the errors into which her "vain spirit" leads her, Emma has still not acquired sufficient self-knowledge to make herself worthy of him. Jane Austen underlines this briefly during the ball by drawing a further parallel between Mrs. Elton's notions of social sovereignty and Emma's. Although possessed of a sufficient degree of reserve to avoid making it obvious, as does Mrs. Elton, that she expects to lead the dance, Emma nevertheless shares this snobbish assumption with her:

Mr. Weston and Mrs. Elton led the way, Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse followed. Emma must submit to stand second to Mrs. Elton, though she had always considered the ball as peculiarly for her. It was almost enough to make her think of marrying. (325)

Even more decisive proof that Emma has not corrected her most serious faults is given shortly afterwards by the way in which she reacts to Harriet's mysterious announcement that she has fallen in love with someone "so superior to Mr. Elton" (341). Harriet is, of course, trying to convey to Emma that, because of the great service that he did her during the Crown ball, Mr. Knightley has now become the object of her affections. Had she realised this, Emma, who is acutely aware of the importance of rank when the immediate world around her is affected, would have been able to point out the hopelessness of Harriet's aspirations and would probably have been made aware of the part that she has played herself in

creating such an improper attachment. Unfortunately, however, Emma is still unable to comprehend that any link could exist between Harriet and areas of real concern to herself, and thus leaps to the conclusion that she is alluding to Frank Churchill, who recently rescued her friend from the gypsies, rather than to Mr. Knightley. Ironically, the misunderstanding arises on this occasion because Harriet has learnt something of the values of Highbury society in spite of Emma's attempts to impose a romantic pattern on her life, and, thus, has come to appreciate that small demonstrations of kindness are often of more significance than obviously heroic deeds. Because of her wilful blindness Emma not only loses an opportunity to correct both her own and Harriet's misapprehensions about the nature of society but also, by encouraging her, sets in motion the process that is not to end until she has been made to believe that she has lost Mr. Knightley to her friend. Feeling no sense of responsibility towards either Harriet or Frank Churchill, Emma is simply titillated by the prospect of such a match and conveniently ignores the fact that he is even further distant socially from Harriet than Mr. Elton. Given the nature of their first encounter, it seems natural to Emma that their whole relationship should proceed in a romantic manner and that differences in rank should consequently be of no importance. So strong is Emma's imagination and so eager is she for the fulfilment of her escapist fantasies that, in spite of her increasing satisfaction with Highbury society and her growing

admiration for Mr. Knightley, she is still capable of suppressing all awareness of the rules of social intercourse when they contradict her own version of experience.

The paradoxical situation in which Emma has unsuspectingly placed herself is explored further during the day at Donwell Abbey. Again Emma feels a sense of contentment with her world, but a note of discord is introduced into the proceedings by indications that Harriet is falling deeper in love with Mr. Knightley and that her flirtatious behaviour with Frank Churchill has helped to create a rift between him and Jane Fairfax. Thus, as before, Jane Austen is concerned to demonstrate that Emma cannot hope to enter into a fully harmonious relationship with her community until she learns to live according to Highbury standards at all times.

Just as the Crown ball was instigated by Frank Churchill, so the Donwell Abbey excursion is inspired by the disruptive influence of another outsider, Mrs. Elton. She complains so much about the postponement of the expedition to Box Hill that Mr. Knightley eventually offers her an alternative form of entertainment in the shape of a day's strawberry-picking in the grounds of his house. Instead of being part of the everyday pattern of Highbury life, as the casual manner in which Mr. Knightley extends his invitation would seem to suggest, visits to Donwell Abbey are extremely rare. Mr. Woodhouse, for example, has not been there for two years, and even the more active Emma has been absent long enough to be "eager to refresh and correct her memory" (357-358) about

the house and grounds. Thus, the very fact that the Donwell Abbey visit takes place is another indication of the increasing mobility of the Highbury social machine.

While he was content to remain in the background during all previous social gatherings, demonstrating his concern for correct behaviour by example only, Mr. Knightley takes full control during the visit to his own home and strives to ensure that everything is conducted according to the highest possible standards. He thus begins by firmly rejecting Mrs. Elton's customary attempt to force her way to the front:

"It is my party. Leave it all to me. I will invite your guests."

"No,"--he calmly replied,--"there is but one married woman in the world whom I can ever allow to invite what guests she pleases to Donwell, and that one is--"

"--Mrs. Weston, I suppose," interrupted Mrs. Elton, rather mortified.

"No--Mrs. Knightley;--and, till she is in being, I will manage such matters myself." (354-355)

As is proper in any Highbury formal social occasion, Mr. Woodhouse is the first object of attention and Mr. Knightley consequently turns down Mrs. Elton's suggestion that they eat outside because he knows that such an arrangement would inevitably make the old man ill. On the day itself none of the happy guests is allowed to proceed outside and partake of the delights of Mr. Knightley's strawberries until Mr. Woodhouse has been settled before a fire in one of the most comfortable rooms in the Abbey, with Mrs. Weston to keep him company and the family collections laid out for his entertainment.

As the guests divide and go their separate ways over his grounds in pursuit of amusement, Mr. Knightley adds further to the dignity of the affair by engaging himself in trying to reunite Harriet and Robert Martin. By taking her to a spot overlooking Abbey-Mill Farm, Mr. Knightley tries subtly to remind Harriet of the "prosperity and beauty" (360) of Robert Martin's home environment.

Emma finds much to be pleased with in this demonstration of the workings of Highbury society at its best and most vital, and feels no need to behave improperly. Instead, after engaging in a pleasant walk with Mr. Weston through the grounds of the Abbey, she takes over the task of amusing Mr. Woodhouse, tries to comfort the distressed Jane Fairfax and soothes the bad-tempered Frank Churchill. So fully does Emma feel a part of her community on this occasion that she derives a deep sense of satisfaction from viewing the home of Mr. Knightley, Highbury's great landed gentleman, and from contemplating her own connections with it:

She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant, as she viewed the respectable size and style of the building, its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation, low and sheltered--its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight--and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up.--The house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms.--It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was--and Emma felt an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding.--Some faults of temper John Knightley had; but Isabella had connected herself unexceptionably. (358)

Significantly the house is fronted by an avenue of limes which appear to provide an approach to it but which, in reality, lead only to a wall. Donwell Abbey is, thus, unapproachable from the outside, being open, in the fullest sense of the word, only to those who already understand the worth of an old-fashioned respectability that lacks even the surface embellishments that Darcy has given to Pemberley. A Mrs. Elton can never hope to enter its confines, but an Emma, who appreciates that it is "just what it ought to be," may.

The more Emma begins to feel the attractions of life within the Highbury community, the more ominous become the discordant notes introduced into its otherwise harmonious group functions by her improper activities. Thus, so distorted has Harriet's conception of the limitations imposed on human relationships by rank become that, instead of turning her attention back to Robert Martin, Mr. Knightley succeeds only in conveying the impression that he is in love with her himself. Harriet later explains to Emma the important part played by this incident in leading her to the conviction that her affections for Mr. Knightley are reciprocated:

The first [strong evidence of affection], was his walking with her apart from the others, in the limewalk at Donwell, where they had been walking some time before Emma came, and he had taken pains (as she was convinced) to draw her from the rest to himself--and at first, he had talked to her in a more particular way than he had ever done before, in a very particular way indeed!--(Harriet could not recall it without a blush.) He seemed to be almost asking her, whether her affections were engaged. (410)

Emma is also responsible, in part, for the more obvious breaks

in harmony created by Jane Fairfax's hurried departure and by Frank Churchill's ill-humoured behaviour. By allowing Frank Churchill to engage her in an extremely improper flirtation, Emma has helped to bring his relationship with Jane Fairfax to such an impasse that she is ready to break their engagement and accept a post as governess to the little Smallridges. The failure of both of the lovers to acquiesce to the overall tranquillity of the proceedings clearly results from these trying personal problems.

Although such pleasant occasions as the Crown ball and the Donwell Abbey excursion serve to make Emma very conscious of the value of her own community and thus temporarily arrest her need to stray morally beyond its boundaries, they do not bring her any nearer to a realisation of the implications of her failure to behave responsibly towards outsiders like Harriet, Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax. Ironically, Emma is not able to achieve self-awareness until she has been motivated by the dullness, tedium and general disharmony of the Box Hill expedition to transcend all limits of propriety.

From the very beginning the day at Box Hill is characterised by "a languor, a want of spirits, a want of union" (367), and it is not long before the party splits up into factions. The Eltons inevitably separate themselves from Emma, Harriet and Frank Churchill, and Mr. Knightley is left to pay the necessary attentions to the otherwise neglected Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax. Emma, thus, not only becomes

bored by the proceedings, but also finds little in the conduct of the other guests to inspire her to pay attention to the quality of her own behaviour. Lacking a lively context within which to operate, Mr. Knightley is once again unable to influence Emma even though he conducts himself impeccably. By the time that Frank Churchill, who had earlier added to the general mood of tedium by being "silent and stupid" (367), rouses himself into a mood of almost defiant gaiety, Emma is ready for anything that can titillate her jaded spirits and joins with him in a most offensive flirtation:

When they all sat down it was better; to her taste a great deal better, for Frank Churchill grew talkative and gay, making her his first object. Every distinguishing attention that could be paid, was paid to her. To amuse her, and be agreeable in her eyes, seemed all that he cared for--and Emma, glad to be enlivened, not sorry to be flattered, was gay and easy too. . . . Not that Emma was gay and thoughtless from any real felicity; it was rather because she felt less happy than she had expected. She laughed because she was disappointed. (367-368)

Not content merely to make a display of themselves in front of the other members of the party, Emma and Frank Churchill try to engage them in a number of silly games. It is as a direct result of Frank Churchill's demand that everyone say "either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated--or two things moderately clever--or three things very dull indeed" (370), that Emma reaches her lowest level by insulting the harmless and good-natured Miss Bates:

"Oh! very well," exclaimed Miss Bates, "then I need not be uneasy. 'Three things very dull indeed.' That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan't I?--(looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on every body's assent)--Do not you all think I shall?"

Emma could not resist.

"Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me--but you will be limited as to number--only three at once." (370)

Although Miss Bates refuses to be offended by this hurtful comment, Mr. Knightley takes Emma aside at the end of the excursion and explains the full implications of what might seem at first sight to be an innocuous, if rather tasteless, joke:

"They [the good and the ridiculous] are blended," said he, "I acknowledge; and, were she prosperous, I could allow much for the occasional prevalence of the ridiculous over the good. Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance, I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation --but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion." (375)

As in her dealings with Harriet, Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, Emma is guilty on this occasion of assuming that she is justified in treating people outside of her own immediate area of concern as objects. However, not only is Miss Bates intimately connected with the core of Highbury society but, as Mr. Knightley points out, it is also one of the most important duties of the village's three leading families to ensure that, despite her poverty and personal faults, she is not deprived totally of her inherited position in the upper reaches of the community. It is, thus, as a result of allowing herself to adopt the arrogantly superior pose that she normally reserves for outsiders in her dealings with a person towards whom she has very obvious responsibilities that Emma is made to realise, at last, that there is no room for even occasional deviations from the Highbury norm:

She was vexed beyond what could have been expressed--almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates!--How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued! (376)

Having acquired a new sense of her social duty, Emma needs only to endure a series of brief moral purgatories, during which she becomes reconciled with Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax and is made to realise the full implications of her cruel interference in Harriet's affairs, before she can be united with Mr. Knightley and take her rightful place at the head of the Highbury community. Their marriage, which is the first Highbury formal social occasion with the exception of the Hartfield party not to suffer either directly or indirectly from the effects of her improper behaviour, symbolises the perfect integration of self with society which Emma finally achieves.

Emma has little difficulty in winning forgiveness for her final deviation from the Highbury ideal since Miss Bates readily accepts the gesture of contrition implicit in her visits to her home, but her second victim, Jane Fairfax, proves to be more resentful of the indignities which she has been forced to endure and refuses to accept either the proposal of a carriage ride or a present of arrowroot. While Jane Fairfax's response is less than gracious, Emma is now so conscious of her own faults that she can feel only sympathy for her attitude:

When Emma afterwards heard that Jane Fairfax had been seen wandering about the meadows, at some distance from Highbury, on the afternoon of the very day on which she had, under the plea of being unequal to any exercise, so peremptorily refused to go out with her in the carriage, she could have no doubt--

putting every thing together--that Jane was resolved to receive no kindness from her. She was sorry, very sorry. Her heart was grieved for a state which seemed but the more pitiable from this sort of irritation of spirits, inconsistency of action, and inequality of powers; and it mortified her that she was given so little credit for proper feeling, or esteemed so little worthy as a friend. (391)

Emma's forbearance soon gains its reward, however, since it needs only a public avowal of affection from Frank Churchill for Jane Fairfax to suppress all sense of past injury and to accept her former antagonist's offers of friendship.

Near as she is to full maturity at this stage, Emma still has several lessons to learn, both about the implications of her self-willed fantasies and the true direction of her own feelings. Thus, in defining the ideal against which Frank Churchill falls short, Emma is still unable to recognise that she is describing Mr. Knightley, and that it is towards him that her affections should be directed:

"Impropriety! Oh! Mrs. Weston--it is too calm a censure. Much, much beyond impropriety!--It has sunk him, I cannot say how it has sunk him in my opinion. So unlike what a man should be!--None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life." (397)

Complete comprehension is granted to her when she learns that Harriet is in love with Mr. Knightley. Not only is Emma reminded once again that juggling with Harriet's rank leads inevitably to confusion, but she is also made to understand that even those irresponsible activities that she has tried to reserve for the most peripheral areas of her life can have an affect on matters of the most intimate concern to herself. Instead of a romantic alliance between Harriet and

Frank Churchill, Emma is now faced with a match that she suddenly realises would ruin her own chances of happiness:

Till now that she was threatened with its loss, Emma had never known how much of her happiness depended on being first with Mr. Knightley, first in interest and affection. (415)

Although Emma is now effectively ready for marriage to Mr. Knightley, Jane Austen first of all punishes her heroine for mistreating Harriet and re-tests her newly-won humility by putting her through a final brief, but extremely painful, purgatory that results from her acceptance of Harriet's unlikely claim that Mr. Knightley has shown signs of returning her affections. While Emma's fears are largely self-induced and rather foolish, her response to the situation created by them is admirable. Not only does Emma accept the blame for giving Harriet the excessive notions of self-consequence which inspired her to turn her thoughts towards the first citizen of Highbury, but she is also more concerned with the damage that an unsuitable marriage would do to Mr. Knightley's position in the community than with her own personal loss:

Mr. Knightley and Harriet Smith!--Such an elevation on her side! Such a debasement on his!--It was horrible to Emma to think how it must sink him in the general opinion, to foresee the smiles, the sneers, the merriment it would prompt at his expense; the mortification and disdain of his brother, the thousand inconveniences to himself. (413)

Having briefly tested her heroine, Jane Austen brings her action to a fitting climax with Mr. Knightley's proposal of marriage. In directing her novel towards this final union Jane Austen has been mainly concerned with Emma's moral

development. However, it is important to recognise that Mr. Knightley has also been forced to modify his response to the world around him, for it was not until Frank Churchill began to pay attention to Emma that he became aware that he was in love with her himself. While all necessary respect is still paid to Mr. Woodhouse and the lives of the couple are arranged to accomodate him, Mr. Knightley is now able fully to assert his claim to be considered the guardian of the revitalised Highbury community and even moves from Donwell Abbey to Hartfield.

The successful resolution of the conflicts and misunderstandings that have for so long troubled the lives of Emma and Mr. Knightley, Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, and Harriet Smith and Robert Martin, who are reunited during her visit to London, carries with it a re-affirmation of the basic worth of the Highbury way of life and of the ability of the community to integrate new elements. Although Emma does not move from the three-house society in which she was situated at the beginning of the novel, she has learnt to appreciate its values more fully and to understand her obligations to the world outside of her own small area of concern, while it has acquired new vitality as a result of her own and Frank Churchill's disruptive activities. While the Eltons are not expelled from the Highbury world, as were the Crawfords and Mrs. Norris from Mansfield Park, there is not the slightest possibility that they will be able to introduce a real element of strife into a community which has never

revealed any important moral flaws and which is now more vigorous than ever before.

In arguing that Jane Austen is giving tacit recognition to the impermanent nature of her idyll by allowing the Eltons to remain in Highbury, Elliot Rubinstein is guilty of ignoring not only the ease with which Mr. Knightley repulses Mrs. Elton's presumptuous attempt at assuming the leadership of the Donwell Abbey excursion, but also the implications of a brilliantly succinct scene epitomising their irrelevance to the Highbury way of life.⁹ While Emma is engaged in cementing her friendship with Jane Fairfax, they both demonstrate their inability to find a meaningful place within the village community. As is implied by the highly symbolic conversation that takes place between Emma and Mrs. Elton, neither of the Eltons has any real knowledge of the workings of Highbury society:

"Oh! no, it is a meeting at the Crown, a regular meeting. Weston and Cole will be there too; but one is apt to speak only of those who lead.--I fancy Mr. E. and Knightley have every thing their own way."

"Have not you mistaken the day?" said Emma. I am almost certain that the meeting at the Crown is not till tomorrow.--Mr. Knightley was at Hartfield yesterday, and spoke of it as for Saturday."

"Oh! no; the meeting is certainly to-day," was the abrupt answer. (456)

The arrival of Mr. Elton, as hot and ill-humoured as was Frank Churchill at Donwell Abbey, serves to confirm the accuracy of Emma's assertions and to demonstrate that the Eltons cannot even agree with each other:

"When I got to Donwell," said he, "Knightley could not be found. Very odd! very unaccountable! after the note

I sent him this morning, and the message he returned, that he should certainly be at home till one."

"Donwell!" cried his wife--"My dear Mr. E., you have not been to Donwell!--You mean the Crown; you come from the meeting at the Crown."

"No, no, that's to-morrow." (457)

By allowing the Eltons to remain on the fringe of the Highbury world, Jane Austen is, in effect, making her fullest statement of faith in the ability of the old order to withstand the threats of anarchic intrusion. The carping comments that Mrs. Elton offers as her contribution to the marriage of Emma and Mr. Knightley thus serve only to underline that she has no comprehension of the difference between the surface and the true significance of the social ritual, and in no way disturb the happiness or the harmony of the "small band of true friends":

The wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties had no taste for finery or parade; and Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own.--"Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business!--Selina would stare when she heard of it."--But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union. (484)

Emma is probably Jane Austen's most widely read novel and has certainly received more critical attention than any of her other works. Nevertheless, in spite of all its obvious virtues, not the least of which is the very firm sense of the interplay between heroine and group that is established by constructing so much of the action around the formal social occasion, it lacks some of the moral tension through which Mansfield Park, in particular, gains so much of its effect.

Emma's path towards personal salvation is clearly marked out from the beginning and her deviations from the norm constitute examples of adolescent exuberance rather than serious challenges to the stability of her world. Even her few moments of genuine anguish are self-created and are quickly relieved by Mr. Knightley's marriage proposal. Compared to Fanny Price's much less deserved period of purgatory in Portsmouth, Emma Woodhouse's "dark night of the soul" is no more than a token gesture on the part of an author whose tone is much more consistently comic here than in any of her other novels. Of the intruders, Mrs. Elton presents a threat that pales in significance besides that offered by Mary Crawford, and even that cunning agent of disorder and intrigue, Frank Churchill, is concerned with concealing his secret engagement and amusing himself rather than with undermining the stability of the Highbury community. Having fully tested the values of her world in her earlier novels, Jane Austen seems to have achieved such a pitch of optimism in Emma that she can afford to direct her attentions towards the creation of her most talented and vivacious heroine and to re-enact the central conflict between the individual and his society in a rather formal manner. The strength of Highbury society is far too evident during all of the novel's formal social occasions, with the exception of the ill-fated Box Hill excursion, for the reader to feel with any conviction, as he does in Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, that the fate of the group is bound up in the

success or failure of the heroine's initiation into adulthood. Thus, while Jane Austen's other novels gain their impact by dramatising the larger social implications of the initiation ritual, Emma is, perhaps, too simply a ritual.

CHAPTER VII

PERSUASION

The extremely personal and somewhat romantic tone of Persuasion has induced many critics to argue that in this, her last completed novel, Jane Austen's view of the relationship between the individual and his society has changed radically. Some, like Lerner, Mudrick and Robert Garis, who are hostile to what they believe to be Jane Austen's usual subordination of the claims of the individual to those of the group, note with pleasure a new emphasis on the importance of feeling and sensibility,¹ while others, such as Walton Litz and James Duffy, argue that the novel marks her realisation that the old communal way of life has lost its protracted battle with the new individualistic ethic.² Duffy even goes so far as to claim that Anne Elliot is the forerunner of a line of nineteenth-century heroines, including Lizzie Hexam, Dorothea Brooke, Isabel Archer and Milly Theale, whom he describes as "large-souled, intelligent women living in a world of fundamental dislocation."³ The first of these two interpretations clearly arises out of a misunderstanding of the dynamic role played by the individual in the earlier novels, but the second is in many ways convincing, even though it relies perhaps rather too heavily on the external evidence provided by the incomplete Sanditon that, at this

stage of her career, Jane Austen was acutely aware of just such a process of disintegration.⁴ Since the decline of the Elliot family derives from within rather than from the efforts of some hostile external force, and since Kellynch Hall is taken over, not by a member of the bourgeoisie, but by Admiral Croft, a rising gentleman, it is possible to assert with complete certainty only that, like Mansfield Park, Persuasion derives its dark, or in this case, autumnal, tone from the particularly difficult and trying situation in which the author has placed her heroine. Nevertheless, the very fact that she should have chosen to present a world in which the sole representative of the landed interest, Sir Walter Elliot, is in a state of decay, and, more important, in which manners and the formal social occasion, rather than serving to reflect the sound moral basis upon which the power of the status quo rests, as they do in the earlier novels, have become a meaningless façade, would seem to indicate that by 1816 Jane Austen was indeed aware that the old order was rapidly losing its prestige and authority.

In direct contrast to any of Jane Austen's earlier heroines, Anne Elliot has achieved maturity by the time the novel opens, only to find that the world in which she is situated cannot offer her any personal fulfillment. She is thus faced, not with the relatively straightforward task of bringing the self into harmony with an already well-established community, but with the apparently hopeless one of finding and initiating herself into a new world in which at least the

basic values of love and duty have some meaning. Maturity has taught Anne only that her father, Sir Walter Elliot, and her sister, Elizabeth, are so obsessed with themselves and with the meaningless surface of life that they have no affection or regard to spare even for their nearest blood-relative. Sir Walter Elliot's life, as Duffy describes it, has been reduced to "a . . . vacuous ceremony"⁵ by his over-riding conviction that rank and personal appearance in themselves constitute criteria for judging an individual's worth. Thus, whereas Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse are called upon to learn of their obligations to others, and Catherine Morland and Fanny Price to learn how to fulfill these obligations, Anne Elliot, the complete gentlewoman, is required to find people who appreciate the value of her concern for those around her.

In moving to the new worlds of Uppercross and Lyme, Anne encounters people who lack her father's refinement, but who have at least a basic comprehension of their social duty. Since the Musgroves cannot extend their sphere of concern beyond the family group, and since the naval characters can only fully understand members of their own profession, both are, socially speaking, at the same stage as the initiate heroines of Jane Austen's other novels. Until they can learn to judge according to more objective standards than familial affection or professional esteem, the Musgroves, the Crofts and the Harvilles will inevitably fall below Jane Austen's social ideal. However, since Jane Austen is mainly

concerned in Persuasion with emphasising that the façade of manners is meaningless unless it reflects a complex set of moral values, the immaturity of Anne's good-hearted new friends pales in significance beside the complete worthlessness of her own family.

Faced as she is with two contrasting social milieus, one of which has degenerated into a decadent condition through its insistence on the importance of external display, and the other of which lacks any mature comprehension of the importance of manners, Anne Elliot is unable to look to the formal social occasion to facilitate her lonely pilgrimage in search of a new world. In a society where the dance and the dinner have no meaningful function, Anne Elliot prefers to absent herself from almost all such occasions. The significant events leading up to her marriage to Wentworth thus occur during casual meetings or out of doors, while formal encounters between the lovers both at Uppercross and at the concert in Bath lead only to misunderstanding and separation. Deprived by her choice of subject of some of her most valuable structural agents, Jane Austen, while still making excellent use of the individual scene, is forced to organise her novel, as Mary Lascelles points out, largely around place.⁶ The degenerate moral climate of Kellynch and Bath neatly sandwiches the vigorous worlds of Uppercross and Lyme, and it is through a comparison of the two environments that Jane Austen justifies Anne's final complete rejection of her own family.

Jane Austen devastatingly exposes the hollowness of

Sir Walter Elliot's way of life in the novel's opening pages by showing how his concern for external show serves both to distort his personal relationships and to make him neglectful of his social duties. Even within the family circle he can judge only according to rank and personal appearance and thus grants the beautiful Elizabeth and the respectably married Mary precedence over the physically faded and unmarried Anne, who has only "an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding" (5), to recommend her. Sir Walter similarly displays a preference for the fortune-hunting Mrs. Clay over the respectable and genuinely devoted Lady Russell simply because the former still retains her youthful appearance, and because she displays a suitably sycophantic respect for the importance of his social position.

Sir Walter Elliot's attitude to his position as the baronet owner of Kellynch Hall is no less inadequate since, instead of regarding it as a source of duty, he looks to it simply for prestige. He thus gains far more pleasure from rereading the record of his family's past glories in the Baronetage than from attending to his present obligations to his estate and tenants. Even after his extravagant spending and frequent trips to London have plunged the family into debt, Sir Walter cannot bear to sacrifice any of the external marks of his rank in order that he might retain control of his estate:

"What! Every comfort of life knocked off! Journeys, London, servants, horses, table,--contractions and restrictions every

where. To live no longer with the decencies even of a private gentleman! No, he would sooner quit Kellynch-hall at once, than remain in it on such disgraceful terms." (13)

By finally agreeing to rent Kellynch and retiring to the sterile pleasures of Bath, Sir Walter demonstrates quite conclusively that his home has no significance for him other than as a symbol of his position in life. Yet, once he has relinquished his estate, Sir Walter Elliot becomes an empty cipher, totally devoid of any function.

Adhering as she does to a very different ethic than that propounded by her father, Anne finds his irresponsible and rather cavalier attitude to duty incomprehensible. For her the good name of the family can be preserved only by making retrenchments and at all costs retaining control of Kellynch Hall. Unfortunately, since she is "nobody" (5) to her father, Anne cannot influence him in any way, and is able only to ensure that the family quits Kellynch in a respectable manner by performing the duties attendant upon a landlord in such a situation herself:

"I have been making a duplicate of the catalogue of my father's books and pictures. I have been several times in the garden with Mackenzie, trying to understand, and make him understand, which of Elizabeth's plants are for Lady Russell. I have had all my own little concerns to arrange --books and music to divide, and all my trunks to repack, from not having understood in time what was intended as to the waggons. And one thing I have had to do, Mary, of a more trying nature; going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave. I was told that they wished it." (38-39)

The unbridgeable gap between father and daughter is epitomised by a conversation about the navy, for while Anne praises sailors for the manner in which they have performed

their duty during the Napoleonic Wars, Sir Walter, as usual judging only according to the criteria of rank and personal appearance, expresses strong objections to the profession:

"Yes; it is in two points offensive to me; I have two strong grounds of objection to it. First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grand-fathers never dreamt of; and secondly, as it cuts up a man's youth and vigour most horribly; a sailor grows old sooner than any other man; I have observed it all my life." (19)

The positions adopted during this argument are, of course, prophetic of the novel's outcome for it is as a member of the group that she praises on this occasion that Anne eventually finds personal happiness.

Life with her family is made even more unbearable for Anne by the realisation that, while in many ways Lady Russell has successfully taken the place of her mother, like Sir Walter, she has too much regard for "rank and consequence" (11). The years of loneliness following her refusal of Wentworth's proposal of marriage serve to convince Anne that, in advising her against him because of his lack of wealth and position, Lady Russell made no attempt to take her personal feelings into account.

Clearly, then, it is not Anne Elliot's task to "inherit" Kellynch in the sense that Fanny Price inherits Mansfield Park, since its inhabitants are beyond any redemptive influence that she might be able to bring to bear. The true heir to Sir Walter Elliot is, ironically enough, Mr. William Walter Elliot, a man who completely despises him, since, in their different ways, each regards the title of

baronet as nothing more than a source of prestige. Anne's first positive action is thus to separate herself from Sir Walter and Elizabeth by choosing to visit her sister Mary at Uppercross instead of going with them to Bath. Although Mary has inherited all of Sir Walter's snobbishness about rank, she is able to exercise very little influence in the Musgrove world and serves only as an ever-present reminder to Anne of the stultifying environment from which she has cut herself loose. Indeed, the Musgroves object so strongly to Mary's obsession with the importance of her social position that on one occasion Henrietta and Louisa find themselves compelled to complain bitterly about her objectionable attempts to claim precedence over their mother:

"I have no scruple of observing to you [Anne], how nonsensical some persons are about their place, because, all the world knows how easy and indifferent you are about it: but I wish any body could give Mary a hint that it would be a great deal better if she were not so very tenacious; especially, if she would not be always putting herself forward to take place of mamma." (46)

Mary's objections to the lowly-born Charles Hayter are also thoroughly routed by Charles Musgrove who points out that, by his own efforts, he has acquired the personal accomplishments and situation in life necessary to make him a worthy match for Henrietta:

"And, pray, who is Charles Hayter? Nothing but a country curate. A most improper match for Miss Musgrove, of Uppercross."

Her husband, however, would not agree with her here; for besides having a regard for his cousin, Charles Hayter was an eldest son, and he saw things as an eldest son himself.

"Now you are talking nonsense, Mary," was therefore his answer. "It would not be a great match for Henrietta, but Charles has a fair chance, through the Spicers, of

getting something from the Bishop in the course of a year or two; and you will please to remember, that he is the eldest son; whenever my uncle dies, he steps into very pretty property. . . . I grant you, that any of them but Charles would be a very shocking match for Henrietta, and indeed it could not be; he is the only one that could be possible; but he is a very good-natured, good sort of a fellow; and whenever Winthrop comes into his hands, he will make a different sort of place of it, and live in a very different sort of way; and with that property, he will never be a contemptible man." (76)

It soon becomes obvious to Anne that, in contrast to her sister, who is nothing more than a self-pitying and hypochondriacal remnant of a morally decaying order, the rest of Uppercross is vigorous and alert to the claims of the individual. Its dynamic character is established by Jane Austen's descriptions of the village,

Uppercross was a moderate-sized village, which a few years back had been completely in the old English style; containing only two houses superior in appearance to those of the yeomen and labourers,--the mansion of the 'squire, with its high walls, great gates, and old trees, substantial and unmodernized--and the compact, tight parsonage, enclosed in its own neat garden, with a vine and a pear-tree trained round its casements; but upon the marriage of the young 'squire, it had received the improvement of a farm-house elevated into a cottage for his residence, (36)

and of the Musgrove family:

The Musgroves, like their houses, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, and not at all elegant. Their children had more modern minds and manners. (40)

This process of improvement is, of course, a long way from complete and, for all the refinements that the younger members of the family have acquired, they still fall a long way short of the ideal embodied in Anne herself. Charles Musgrove's passion for ratting and shooting reflects the continued influence of the Squire Western-like "old English style" and,

in spite of their accomplishments and easy manners, Louisa and Henrietta tend to be self-willed and flighty. However, while not envying their manners, Anne does feel a great sense of admiration for the Musgroves' mutual affection and close family ties:

Anne always contemplated them as some of the happiest creatures of her acquaintance; but still, saved as we all are by some comfortable feeling of superiority from wishing for the possibility of exchange, she would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments; and envied them nothing but that seemingly perfect good understanding and agreement together, that good-humoured mutual affection, of which she had known so little herself with either of her sisters. (41)

Having suffered the effects of meaningless ceremony for so long Anne is in no mood to pay any regard to the finer points of social intercourse in her dealings with these socially crude, but kind and friendly people:

"Where shall we go?" said she [Mary], when they were ready. "I suppose you will not like to call at the Great House before they have been to see you?"

"I have not the smallest objection on that account," replied Anne. "I should never think of standing on such ceremony with people I know so well as Mrs. and the Miss Musgroves." (39-40)

Unfortunately, Anne's acceptance into the Musgroves' closely-knit circle is hindered by precisely the faults that she is prepared to ignore. Lacking any understanding of the importance of manners, the Musgroves have little ability to reach beyond themselves or to judge the worth of outsiders:

Anne had not wanted this visit to Uppercross, to learn that a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea. She had never been staying there before, without being struck by it, or without wishing that other Elliots could have her advantage in seeing how unknown, or unconsidered there were the affairs which at Kellynch-hall were treated as of such general publicity and

pervading interest; yet, with all this experience, she believed she must now submit to feel that another lesson, in the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle, was become necessary for her. (42)

Anne's "nothingness,"⁷ however, is now of a very different nature from that which characterised her relationship with her own family, since it arises out of a lack of comprehension rather than from a basically alien approach to experience, and she realises that she can justifiably hope to find a worthwhile place within this "little social commonwealth":

She acknowledged it to be very fitting, that every little social commonwealth should dictate its own matters of discourse; and hoped, ere long, to become a not unworthy member of the one she was now transplanted into. (43)

Unlike a Mr. Knightley, who is granted repeated opportunities to demonstrate his good qualities within the context of the formal social occasion, Anne must patiently wait for more obviously testing situations in order to prove her worth to the Musgroves. Social evenings at Uppercross are strictly family affairs and Anne is unable to play any meaningful part in them. Even before the arrival of Wentworth makes her try to exclude herself completely from such proceedings, Anne always finds herself effectively separated from the main group. Thus, when she plays the piano Anne realises that she is performing for an uncomprehending and uninterested audience:

She knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself. . . . In music she had been always used to feel alone in the world; and Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove's fond partiality for their own daughters' performance, and total indifference to any other person's, gave her much more pleasure for their sakes, than mortification for her own. (47)

This passage sums up the reasons for Anne's isolation very

succinctly. In their reaction to piano-playing, the Musgroves are typically much less concerned with the quality of the performance, which requires an objective judgement, than with their relationship to the performer. However, while she is acutely aware of the unjust reasons for her lack of consequence, Anne is clearly prepared to forgive almost anything in return for being allowed to view such examples of deep familial love.

In a world which lacks any subtle comprehension of the moral significance of the individual's polite performance, Anne discovers that even within the context of the formal social occasion she must win the regard of the Musgroves by actively demonstrating her utility rather than by displaying her good manners:

The girls were wild for dancing; and the evenings ended, occasionally, in an unpremeditated little ball. There was a family of cousins within a walk of Uppercross, in less affluent circumstances, who depended on the Musgroves for all their pleasures: they would come at any time, and help play at any thing, or dance any where; and Anne, very much preferring the office of musician to a more active post, played country dances to them by the hour together; a kindness which always recommended her musical powers to the notice of Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove more than any thing else. (47)

Anne's personal worth is demonstrated even more clearly by the manner in which she completely takes charge after young Charles dislocates his collar-bone. While Mary has hysterics and the servants panic, Anne occupies herself with performing all the tasks necessary both to alleviate the child's pain and to restore order in the household:

It was an afternoon of distress, and Anne had every thing to do at once—the apothecary to send for--the father to have pursued and informed--the mother to support and keep from

hysterics--the servants to control--the youngest child to banish, and the poor suffering one to attend and soothe;--besides sending, as soon as she recollected it, proper notice to the other house, which brought her an accession rather of frightened, enquiring companions, than of very useful assistants. (53)

Although such displays of steadiness and usefulness gradually win Anne the respect of the Musgroves, it is not until she proves herself even more conclusively after Louisa's fall from the Cobb at Lyme that they begin fully to recognise that she is indispensable to them. Throughout her visit to Uppercross, Anne remains very much on the outside of the family circle.

Since the ritual action has no importance in this society, Anne cannot, of course, look to the formal social occasion to facilitate a renewal of mutual understanding and affection with her former lover, Wentworth. Even when she is compelled to attend the same functions as he, there is absolutely no communication between the couple. Indeed, instead of drawing Anne closer to Wentworth, social occasions serve only to emphasise the emotional gap that has kept them apart for eight years:

They had no conversation together, no intercourse but what the commonest civility required. Once so much to each other! Now nothing! There had been a time, when of all the large party now filling the drawing-room at Uppercross, they would have found it most difficult to cease to speak to one another. With the exception, perhaps, of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who seemed particularly attached and happy, (Anne could allow no other exception even among the married couples) there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved. Now they were as strangers; nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted. It was a perpetual estrangement. (63-64)

Similarly, instead of serving as a medium of communication, manners simply become a tool utilised by Wentworth in order

to affect a separation between himself and Anne when they are accidentally brought together:

She had left the instrument on the dancing being over, and he had sat down to try to make out an air which he wished to give the Miss Musgroves an idea of. Unintentionally she returned to that part of the room; he saw her, and, instantly rising, said, with studied politeness,

"I beg your pardon, Madam, this is your seat;" and though she immediately drew back with a decided negative, he was not to be induced to sit down again.

Anne did not wish for more of such looks and speeches. His cold politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than any thing. (72)

Captain Wentworth's manoeuvre on this occasion is very different from Willoughby's at the London ball in Sense and Sensibility, despite their striking surface similarity.

Acting as he is in a world where manners still have a significant role to play within the framework of the formal social occasion, Willoughby is guilty of perverting an extremely efficacious code of behaviour towards personal ends, whereas Wentworth is merely giving recognition to its present defunct condition.

Only by providing her with opportunities to observe his excellent conduct and to discover that he has been properly fulfilling his function in life, do social gatherings at Uppercross help occasionally, and in the most indirect way possible, to further Anne's attachment to Wentworth. Thus, on one occasion, although any possibility of direct intercourse with him is effectively curtailed by the intervention of her hostess's bulky form, Anne is able to overhear his extremely kind attempts to alleviate Mrs. Musgrove's rather ridiculous grief over the death of her worthless son, Dick:

There was a momentary expression in Captain Wentworth's face at this speech, a certain glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth, which convinced Anne, that instead of sharing in Mrs. Musgrove's kind wishes, as to her son, he had probably been at some pains to get rid of him; but it was too transient an indulgence of self-amusement to be detected by any who understood him less than herself; in another moment he was perfectly collected and serious; and almost instantly afterwards coming up to the sofa, on which she and Mrs. Musgrove were sitting, took a place by the latter, and entered into conversation with her, in a low voice, about her son, doing it with so much sympathy and natural grace, as shewed the kindest consideration for all that was real and unabsurd in the parent's feelings.

They were actually on the same sofa, for Mrs. Musgrove had most readily made room for him;--they were divided only by Mrs. Musgrove. It was no insignificant barrier indeed. (67-68)

Similarly, earlier in the same evening, although the information is granted to her as an eavesdropper, rather than as a participating member of the group gathered around him to hear tales of his exploits at sea, Anne is made fully aware of the value of Wentworth's conduct during the recent war:

"Ah! she was a dear old Asp to me. She did all that I wanted. I knew she would.--I knew that we should either go to the bottom together or that she would be the making of me; and I never had two days of foul weather all the time I was at sea in her; and after taking privateers enough to be very entertaining, I had the good luck, in my passage home the next autumn, to fall in with the very French frigate I wanted. --I brought her into Plymouth; and here was another instance of luck. We had not been six hours in the Sound, when a gale came on, which lasted four days and nights, and which would have done for poor old Asp, in half the time; our touch with the Great Nation not having much improved our condition. Four-and-twenty hours later, and I should only have been a gallant Captain Wentworth, in a small paragraph at one corner of the newspapers; and being lost in only a sloop, nobody would have thought about me."

Anne's shudderings were to herself, alone: but the Miss Musgroves could be as open as they were sincere, in their exclamations of pity and horror. (65-66)

By expressing this modest appreciation of the opportunity given him by his naval appointments for performing his national duty and advancing his own career, Wentworth shows

that his ships, which have the same role to play in the life of a sailor as the great house in that of the baronet, are much more to him than concrete symbols of his own importance.

As in her relationship with the Musgroves, so Anne and Wentworth must generally communicate through active demonstrations of worth, and Jane Austen takes some pains to emphasise the impromptu nature of the meetings that help to bring them together again. Anne's first significant encounter with Wentworth thus occurs when he pays an unexpected morning visit to Uppercross Cottage a few days after she has avoided a more formal meeting by absenting herself from the Musgroves' dinner party. While both of them are extremely embarrassed at suddenly finding themselves alone together, and communicate only through polite trivialities, Wentworth is finally able to make his first gesture of concern by freeing her from the unwelcome attentions of the child, Walter:

In another moment, however, she found herself in the state of being released from him; some one was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it. (80)

Anne is acutely conscious of the significance of this action:

Her sensations on the discovery made her perfectly speechless. She could not even thank him. She could only hang over little Charles, with most disordered feelings. His kindness in stepping forward to her relief--the manner--the silence in which it had passed--the little particulars of the circumstance--with the conviction soon forced on her by the noise he was studiously making with the child, that he meant to avoid hearing her thanks, and rather sought to testify that her conversation was the last of his wants, produced such a confusion of varying, but very painful agitation, as she could not recover from. (80)

Wentworth's second kind attention to Anne also occurs

after a group function which has failed to bring them together. The walk which takes the younger members of the Musgrove family, Anne and Wentworth, to Winthrop is very much a family affair and, culminating as it does in the reunion of Henrietta and Charles Hayter, serves to illustrate once again the Musgroves' good sense and lack of pretension in matters pertaining to themselves. Although Henrietta has temporarily been estranged from her fiancé because of her attraction to Wentworth, she has too much respect for the advice of the other members of her family to reject Charles and Louisa's united attempts to make her continue the walk as far as his house:

Henrietta, conscious and ashamed, and seeing no cousin Charles walking along any path, or leaning against any gate, was ready to do as Mary wished; but "No," said Charles Musgrove, and "No, no," cried Louisa more eagerly, and taking her sister aside, seemed to be arguing the matter warmly.

.....
After a little succession of these sort of debates and consultations, it was settled between Charles and his two sisters, that he, and Henrietta, should just run down for a few minutes, to see their aunt and cousins, while the rest of the party waited for them at the top of the hill. (85-86)

This clear expression of group harmony does not, however, extend as far as Anne, and she is very conscious throughout the walk of her lack of any firmly defined place. As the party sets out, Anne thus resolves somewhat stoically to derive her pleasure from the observation of nature rather than from social intercourse:

Anne's object was, not to be in the way of any body, and where the narrow paths across the fields made many separations necessary, to keep with her brother and sister. Her pleasure in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges. (84)

Her reticence on this occasion is very different from that which leads to Fanny Price's affective exclusion from the Sotherton visit. Whereas Fanny was too timid to claim a social position that was rightfully hers, Anne is acutely and maturely aware that, as yet, this society has no position to offer her. In the first instance it is the heroine who displays immaturity and in the second, the social group, since it is unable to comprehend the value of an Anne Elliot.

Anne's sense of isolation is intensified when, as an unwilling eavesdropper, she overhears Wentworth express a genuine interest in Louisa. The hedge dividing Anne from the lovers is emblematic of the frustrating barriers that are preventing her from playing an active role in the albeit "rough, wild sort" of world around her:

Anne, really tired herself, was glad to sit down; and she very soon heard Captain Wentworth and Louisa in the hedge-row, behind her, as if making their way back, along the rough, wild sort of channel, down the centre. (87)

It is particularly ironic that Wentworth, by interpreting Louisa's rather stubborn nature as firm and durable, should praise her for the very qualities that make Anne the only worthy object of his affection:

"Your sister is an amiable creature; but yours is the character of decision and firmness, I see. If you value her conduct or happiness, infuse as much of your own spirit into her, as you can. But this, no doubt, you have been always doing. It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on.--You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Every body may sway it; let those who would be happy be firm.--Here is a nut," said he, catching one down from an upper bough. "To exemplify,--a beautiful glossy nut, which, blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn. Not a puncture, not a weak spot any where." (88)

Emerging as it does out of a day on which she has suffered from a general lack of consequence and has been exposed to the mortifying experience of seeing the man that she loves drawing apparently even further away from her, Anne has good reason to find Wentworth's second act of consideration particularly gratifying. Although his attention might consciously be turned towards Louisa, Wentworth is the only one of the party to consider that Anne might like to accept the Crofts' offer of a ride home in their carriage. Thus, while it is felt by the others that the invitation has been "generally" refused, even though only Louisa, Henrietta and Mary have made their wishes known, Wentworth demonstrates an awareness of, and an ability to serve, Anne's needs by asking his sister to extend the offer specifically to her:

The invitation was general, and generally declined. The Miss Musgroves were not at all tired, and Mary was either offended, by not being asked before any of the others, or what Louisa called the Elliot pride could not endure to make a third in a one horse chaise.

The walking-party had crossed the lane, and were surmounting an opposite stile; and the admiral was putting his horse into motion again, when Captain Wentworth cleared the hedge in a moment to say something to his sister.--The something might be guessed by its effects.

"Miss Elliot, I am sure you are tired," cried Mrs. Croft. "Do let us have the pleasure of taking you home."
(90-91)

The scene of significant action now switches to Lyme, and it is during her visit to Captain Wentworth's naval friends, the Harvilles, that Anne's fortunes take a dramatic turn for the better. Her response to Louisa's fall from the Cobb not only makes the Musgroves and the Harvilles fully appreciative of her worth but also begins to win back to her

Wentworth's love. The second of these developments is all the more gratifying to Anne because she has come to realise that her best chance of happiness lies in becoming a member of the naval group to which Wentworth belongs. Besides feeling the great warmth of personal affection that radiates from the relationship of Captain and Mrs. Harville, Anne senses that an atmosphere of benevolence and mutual esteem permeates the whole naval group. Instead of judging entirely in terms of familial affection, as do the Musgroves, the sailors are capable of gauging at least the members of their own profession according to more objective criteria. The great sense of companionship that exists between Wentworth and Harville thus depends to a large extent upon the respect of each for the manner in which the other has performed his national duty. So conscious is Harville of the importance of his role in life that he has even contrived that his lodgings reflect this profession:

The varieties in the fitting-up of the rooms, where the common necessities provided by the owner, in the common indifferent plight, were contrasted with some few articles of a rare species of wood, excellently worked up, and with something curious and valuable from all the distant countries Captain Harville had visited, were more than amusing to Anne: connected as it all was with his profession, the fruit of its labours, the effect of its influence on his habits, the picture of repose and domestic happiness it presented, made it to her a something more, or less, than gratification. (98)

Thus, at least in embryo, the naval world is approaching somewhere near to the sense of a single communal goal upon which Mr. Knightley's generally benevolent attitude towards the people of Highbury depends. Lacking any subtle

understanding of the role of manners, the naval characters do not as yet have the tools for readily understanding the worth of those belonging to other occupations, but they have made the crucial step from relationships based entirely on the framework of the family to those depending to a large extent on a set of commonly shared values. Their superiority over the Musgroves is perhaps best summed up in the fate of Dick Musgrove, the only one of the family who tried to make his way in the naval world. The least solid of the family to begin with, Musgrove proved to be the kind of midshipman "every captain wishes to be rid of" (51), and was shuttled from ship to ship until he died, generally unlamented, "before he reached his twentieth year" (50).

Since Anne feels at the beginning of her visit to Lyme that entry into a group which so admirably combines "domestic virtues" and "national importance" (252) will always be closed to her, her reaction to the relationship between Harville and Wentworth is somewhat ambivalent:

There was so much attachment to Captain Wentworth in all this, and such a bewitching charm in a degree of hospitality so uncommon, so unlike the usual style of give-and-take invitations, and dinners of formality and display, that Anne felt her spirits not likely to be benefited by an increasing acquaintance among his brother-officers. "These would have been all my friends," was her thought; and she had to struggle against a great tendency to lowness. (98)

However, despite these rather gloomy prognostications, Anne is so personally invigorated by such evidence that all health has not gone out of society that she even begins to show physical signs of rejuvenation. Having faded in the sterile soil of Kellynch, Anne Elliot blooms again in the healthy air

of Lyme. Nowhere else does Jane Austen make the inevitable connection between the fate of the individual and that of his society so explicit:

She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it had also produced. (104)

Although this improvement in Anne's appearance attracts Wentworth's admiration it needs to be supported by more concrete evidence of her worth before his affections can be won again. The necessary testing situation is conveniently provided when the impetuous Louisa falls from the Cobb and knocks herself unconscious. Not only does Louisa's wilful conduct immediately prior to the accident show Wentworth that what he had mistaken for firmness in her was merely stubbornness, but the manner in which Anne responds to his anguished cry for help also teaches him that she possesses qualities of steadiness lacking in anyone else in his world:

"Is there no one to help me?" were the first words which burst from Captain Wentworth, in a tone of despair, and as if all his own strength were gone.

"Go to him, go to him," cried Anne, "for heaven's sake go to him. I can support her myself. Leave me, and go to him. Rub her hands, rub her temples; here are salts,--take them, take them." (110)

Anne continues to behave with admirable firmness and decision after all attempts to rouse Louisa have failed:

Louisa was raised up and supported more firmly between them, and every thing was done that Anne had prompted, but in vain; while Captain Wentworth, staggering against the wall for his support, exclaimed in the bitterest agony,

"Oh God! her father and mother!"

"A surgeon!" said Anne.

He caught the word; it seemed to rouse him at once, and saying only "True, true, a surgeon this instant," was darting away, when Anne eagerly suggested,

"Captain Benwick, would not it be better for Captain Benwick? He knows where a surgeon is to be found."

Every one capable of thinking felt the advantage of the idea. (110)

By taking control of the situation in this assertive manner, Anne at last proves that, like a responsible adult amongst good-natured, but rather helpless, children, she is indispensable to the group. From this point on it is to her that her friends turn for guidance, and Anne thus moves in one step from the edge of the community to its centre. Both Wentworth and Charles Musgrove, the two males leading the party along the Cobb, acquiesce quite automatically to Anne's new position of authority:

Anne, attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried, at intervals, to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth. Both seemed to look to her for directions.

"Anne, Anne," cried Charles, "what is to be done next? What, in heaven's name, is to be done next?"

Captain Wentworth's eyes were also turned towards her. (111)

Similarly, when Wentworth returns with Anne and Henrietta to Uppercross to break the bad news of Louisa's accident to the Musgroves, he turns to her almost deferentially to receive approval for his plan of action:

In a low, cautious voice, he said,

"I have been considering what we had best do. She must not appear at first. She could not stand it. I have been thinking whether you had not better remain in the carriage with her, while I go in and break it to Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove. Do you think this a good plan?"

She did: he was satisfied, and said no more. (117)

The Musgroves themselves become so dependent on Anne that when she resolves to return to Lyme, they rather pathetically ask, "What should they do without her?" (122). Only Mary,

here more clearly than ever the true daughter of Sir Walter Elliot, lacks the moral sense to comprehend her sister's worth, and even goes so far as to usurp the position of nurse that Wentworth begs Anne to take.

Anne's perspective has changed so much as a result of her visits to Uppercross and Lyme that she is no longer able to feel any great concern for the affairs of her father and sister:

When they came to converse, she was soon sensible of some mental change. The subjects of which her heart had been full on leaving Kellynch, and which she had felt slighted, and been compelled to smother among the Musgroves, were now become but of secondary interest. She had lately lost sight even of her father and sister and Bath. Their concerns had been sunk under those of Uppercross. (124)

Moreover, so conscious has she become of the virtues of her naval friends that, instead of regretting that Kellynch Hall has passed out of the hands of the Elliot family, she feels sure that Admiral Croft will make a much better landlord than Sir Walter:

. . . she had in fact so high an opinion of the Crofts, and considered her father so very fortunate in his tenants, felt the parish to be so sure of a good example, and the poor of the best attention and relief, that however sorry and ashamed for the necessity of the removal, she could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners'. (125)

Certainly there is sufficient evidence during Anne's visit to her former home to suggest that the Admiral is indeed busily engaged in sweeping away all concern for show and the self in favour of a more utilitarian ideal:

"I have done very little besides sending away some of the large looking-glasses from my dressing-room, which was your father's. A very good man, and very much the gentleman I am

sure--but I should think, Miss Elliot" (looking with serious reflection) "I should think he must be rather a dressy man for his time of life.--Such a number of looking-glasses! oh Lord! there was no getting away from oneself." (127-128)

With these very obvious demonstrations on Anne's part of preference for the worlds of Uppercross and Lyme, the new moral universe of Persuasion is now almost complete, and it requires only Wentworth's proposal of marriage to set her completely free from her father. However, before concluding her novel, Jane Austen brings Anne's old and new worlds into direct juxtaposition by first of all removing Anne, and then all of her friends, to Bath. The crucial moral differences between the two worlds are epitomised by the cinematographic manner in which the final scene at Uppercross is "dissolved" into the first at Bath. Thus, the convivial noise of the Musgrove children's Christmas party, which Anne finds a source of great delight, is gradually replaced by harsh and brittle street sounds that herald entry into an environment devoted entirely to idle pleasure:

Every body has their taste in noises as well as in other matters; and sounds are quite innoxious, or most distressing, by their sort rather than their quantity. When Lady Russell, not long afterwards, was entering Bath on a wet afternoon, and driving through the long course of streets from the Old Bridge to Camden-place, amidst the dash of other carriages, the heavy rumble of carts and drays, the bawling of newsmen, muffin-men and milk-men, and the ceaseless clink of pattens, she made no complaint. No, these were noises which belonged to the winter pleasures. (135)

There is little that Jane Austen can add to her earlier comprehensive analysis of Sir Walter Elliot's faults, but for Anne, at least, her recent experiences make his foolish snobbishness seem all the more objectionable. Moving

as she is from a world where she has at last found love, Anne cannot help but be acutely aware of the diminished position that she occupies within the context of her own family. She is welcomed by Sir Walter and Elizabeth only because she enhances the correctness of their dinner arrangements:

Her father and sister were glad to see her, for the sake of shewing her the house and furniture, and met her with kindness. Her making a fourth, when they sat down to dinner, was noticed as an advantage. (137)

Any lingering feelings of familial affection that Anne might possess are soon changed to disgust by her observation of the manner in which Sir Walter toadies to Lady Dalrymple. Since Lady Dalrymple is a thoroughly objectionable and silly woman it is obvious to Anne that her father's respect derives entirely from a regard for her inherited social position:

Anne was ashamed. Had Lady Dalrymple and her daughter even been very agreeable, she would still have been ashamed of the agitation they created, but they were nothing. There was no superiority of manner, accomplishment, or understanding. (149-150)

However, Jane Austen is much more concerned by this stage with examining that extremely self-conscious manipulator of good manners, William Walter Elliot, than with reiterating her criticism of the rather transparent Sir Walter Elliot. Whereas Sir Walter is relatively harmless to an intelligent and aware being like Anne, Mr. Elliot, who emerges as a potential suitor, poses very real problems because, on the surface, he is completely unobjectionable. His manners are on a par with Wentworth's, he is clearly a man of considerable intelligence and, in discussing the accident at Lyme, he displays a degree of genuine interest that is very different from Sir

Walter's hollow expressions of concern. In her review of Mr. Elliot's qualities Anne finds that, in his combination of personal and social accomplishments, he seems to approach close to the ideal set by a Darcy or a Mr. Knightley:

Every thing united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart. He had strong feelings of family-attachment and family-honour, without pride or weakness; he lived with the liberality of a man of fortune, without display; he judged for himself in every thing essential, without defying public opinion in any point of worldly decorum. (146)

To an Emma Woodhouse, used as she is to a world in which the surface is usually a reliable reflection of the inner man, Mr. Elliot would doubtless have been even more acceptable than the almost equally devious Frank Churchill. However, Anne has become so wary of the value of the façade of good manners that, although she is naturally impressed by Mr. Elliot, she never for a moment blinds herself to certain inconsistencies between his present excellent conduct and what she is able to learn of his past behaviour:

She distrusted the past, if not the present. The names which occasionally dropt of former associates, the allusions to former practices and pursuits, suggested suspicions not favourable of what he had been. . . . How could it ever be ascertained that his mind was truly cleansed? (160-161)

Even though her suspicions are not fully confirmed until Mrs. Smith conveniently provides conclusive evidence of his true depravity, Anne finds throughout their relationship that, apart from his possible vices, Mr. Elliot lacks the openness of character that she would require of anyone who was to be a serious rival to Wentworth:

Mr. Elliot was rational, discreet, polished,--but he was not

open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection. Her early impressions were incurable. She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. (161)

Thus, when Lady Russell suggests that Mr. Elliot would make a suitable match, Anne is momentarily attracted to the prospect of becoming the future Lady Elliot and thus being restored to Kellynch, but has little real hesitation in rejecting the suggestion:

The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the precious name of "Lady Elliot" first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home for ever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist. Lady Russell said not another word, willing to leave the matter to its own operation; and believing that, could Mr. Elliot at that moment with propriety have spoken for himself!--She believed, in short, what Anne did not believe. The same image of Mr. Elliot speaking for himself, brought Anne to composure again. The charm of Kellynch and of "Lady Elliot" all faded away. She never could accept him. And it was not only that her feelings were still adverse to any man save one; her judgment, on a serious consideration of the possibilities of such a case, was against Mr. Elliot. (160)

By presenting a man whose real self is so grossly misrepresented by his manners and whom Anne Elliot feels justified in rejecting, even before she learns the truth about him, simply because he lacks a necessary openness of character, Jane Austen completes the extremely hostile attack on the value of surface that she began with her presentation of Sir Walter and his daughters, Elizabeth and Mary.

The fact that William Walter Elliot does for some time become a stumbling block in the relationship between Anne and Wentworth must be blamed entirely on the demands of manners and the formal social occasion. Thus, Anne is deprived of any chance of turning her brief and unexpected

encounter with Wentworth in a Bath shop into a meaningful reunion because of her prior acceptance of Mr. Elliot's offer to escort her home. When Wentworth extends a similar invitation, Anne is obliged to subordinate the dictates of her own feelings to those of correct form, and refuse him.

She and Wentworth are similarly kept apart during their only formal encounter in Bath, at the benefit concert. Thus, although they are briefly drawn together by a discussion about Lyme and about Benwick's engagement to Louisa, Wentworth and Anne soon find themselves effectively separated by her obligatory attachment to the Elliot-Dalrymple party from which he is excluded. Their conversation and the manner in which it is terminated by the entry of Lady Dalrymple concretely reflects the impossibility of Anne's belonging at once to the Elliot and the Lyme worlds. Her reaction to this enforced separation from Wentworth indicates very clearly where her loyalties lie:

As she ceased, the entrance door opened again, and the very party appeared for whom they were waiting. "Lady Dalrymple, Lady Dalrymple," was the rejoicing sound. . . . Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret, escorted by Mr. Elliot and Colonel Wallis, who had happened to arrive nearly at the same instant, advanced into the room. The others joined them, and it was a group in which Anne found herself also necessarily included. She was divided from Captain Wentworth. Their interesting, almost too interesting conversation must be broken up for a time; but slight was the penance compared with the happiness which brought it on! (184)

As in the shop, Mr. Elliot profits by this artificial division between the two lovers, and manages to occupy her attentions throughout the entire evening. Even when Wentworth does find an opportunity to engage her in conversation,

Anne is obliged by the demands of politeness to turn away from him and give her attention once again to Mr. Elliot:

They talked for a few minutes more; the improvement held; he even looked down towards the bench, as if he saw a place on it well worth occupying; when, at that moment, a touch on her shoulder obliged Anne to turn round.--It came from Mr. Elliot. He begged her pardon, but she must be applied to, to explain Italian again. Miss Carteret was very anxious to have a general idea of what was next to be sung. Anne could not refuse; but never had she sacrificed to politeness with a more suffering spirit. (190)

Although this incident makes Wentworth so jealous of Mr. Elliot that he flees the proceedings, his gesture of rejection does not carry the significance of, for example, Elizabeth Bennet's refusal of Darcy's marriage proposal. Having little regard for the ritual, Anne is less concerned with the symbolic content of action than with her intuition that Wentworth is at last fully in love with her. Instead of acting as a microcosm of the individual's larger purpose, the formal occasion has no significance beyond itself, and Anne's union with Mr. Elliot can only last until the end of the evening.

Full reconciliation with Wentworth must inevitably be reached within the bosom of the world to which each now effectively belongs, and it is thus by moving the scene to the Crofts' lodgings at the White Hart that Jane Austen prepares the ground for bringing the two lovers together. The manner in which Anne is welcomed by the Musgroves when she first visits the inn confirms that she is now generally accepted as an important member of their world:

They found Mrs. Musgrove and her daughter within, and by themselves, and Anne had the kindest welcome from each.

Henrietta was exactly in that state of recently-improved views, of fresh-formed happiness, which made her full of regard and interest for every body she had ever liked before at all; and Mrs. Musgrove's real affection had been won by her usefulness when they were in distress. It was a heartiness, and a warmth, and a sincerity which Anne delighted in the more, from the sad want of such blessings at home. (220)

Although the proceedings become predictably confused and chaotic as increasing numbers of friends arrive, Anne is too involved in the general sense of benevolence to complain at any reduction in comfort:

A morning of thorough confusion was to be expected. A large party in an hotel ensured a quick-changing, unsettled scene. One five minutes brought a note, the next a parcel, and Anne had not been there half an hour, when their dining-room, spacious as it was, seemed more than half filled; a party of steady old friends were seated round Mrs. Musgrove, and Charles came back with Captains Harville and Wentworth. (221)

So irrelevant does the Elliot world seem in this setting that no-one is at all overawed by Sir Walter's invitation to an evening party. Indeed, Charles Musgrove makes great sport of it and succeeds in frightening Mary into believing that he will be presumptuous enough not to attend:

"Phoo! phoo!" replied Charles, "what's an evening party? Never worth remembering. Your father might have asked us to dinner, I think, if he had wanted to see us. You may do as you like, but I shall go to the play."

"Oh! Charles, I declare it will be too abominable if you do! when you promised to go." (223)

Charles's jokes of course have a very serious intent since he is concerned to emphasise to his wife that he has no sympathy with Sir Walter's supercilious offer to allow people whom he obviously feels are his inferiors the great privilege of being introduced to Lady Dalrymple.

The arrival of Sir Walter in support of his invitation serves to stress just how alien the two worlds are to

each other. The atmosphere of activity and happiness is instantly changed to one of chill formality by his almost ogre-like entrance:

Their preparations, however, were stopped short. Alarming sounds were heard; other visitors approached, and the door was thrown open for Sir Walter and Miss Elliot, whose entrance seemed to give a general chill. Anne felt an instant oppression, and, wherever she looked, saw symptoms of the same. The comfort, the freedom, the gaiety of the room was over, hushed into cold composure, determined silence, or insipid talk, to meet the heartless elegance of her father and sister. (226)

Despite these very clear indications that she now belongs to his world and not to the snobbish environment of which Mr. Elliot has become a part, it is in keeping with the extremely basic mode of communication through which their relationship has developed, that Wentworth should refuse to approach Anne until she explicitly and deliberately rejects his rival by expressing an aversion to the idea of attending the private party at which he is to be one of the most important guests:

"If it depended only on my inclination, ma'am, the party at home (excepting on Mary's account) would not be the smallest impediment. I have no pleasure in the sort of meeting, and should be too happy to change it for a play, and with you. But, it had better not be attempted, perhaps."

She had spoken it; but she trembled when it was done, conscious that her words were listened to, and daring not even to try to observe their effect.

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Captain Wentworth left his seat, and walked to the fire-place; probably for the sake of walking away from it soon afterwards, and taking a station, with less bare-faced design, by Anne.

"You have not been long enough in Bath," said he, "to enjoy the evening parties of the place."

"Oh! no. The usual character of them has nothing for me. I am no card-player."

"You were not formerly, I know. You did not use to like cards; but time makes many changes."

"I am not yet so much changed," cried Anne, and stopped, fearing she hardly knew what misconstruction. (224-225)

This reunion is completed when Anne visits the White Hart for a second time and, by making an extended defence of female fidelity, at last convinces Wentworth that she has indeed remained faithful to him during eight apparently hopeless years. It is, thus, not until she has demonstrated her personal worth and love for Wentworth in the most explicit manner possible that Anne can win back his affection.

They come together, as might be expected, in a completely impromptu manner when Anne, overjoyed at receiving the written statement of affection handed to her by Wentworth as he left the White Hart, encounters him in the street on her way home. The extremely private nature of the ritual involved in their progress together down the aptly named Union Street is underlined, as Elsbree points out, by Jane Austen's use of the dance metaphor:⁸

There could not be an objection. There could be only a most proper alacrity, a most obliging compliance for public view; and smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture. In half a minute, Charles was at the bottom of Union-street again, and the other two proceeding together. (240)

In learning to accept Elizabeth Bennet, Darcy also had to learn to accept her family. Similarly, even after the blessed couples, Marianne and Colonel Brandon, and Elinor and Edward Ferrars, have removed to Barton they do not cut off all communication with the less worthy Mrs. Dashwood or the Middletons. Yet, marriage for Anne Elliot means a total withdrawal from her own family circle since Sir Walter Elliot

could exercise only a deadening influence over the vigorous world into which she is now fully entering. The optimism with which Persuasion, like all of Jane Austen's novels, ends, is thus of a somewhat limited nature. The ideal of existence preached by Jane Austen and lived out by Anne Elliot, who, for all her generosity towards the faults of others, always behaves impeccably herself, has survived, despite a complete and irreparable breakdown in at least one sector of society; but it most certainly has not triumphed. Anne is now faced with the task of teaching her new "family" the value of refinement and with trying to show how an understanding of a universally comprehended system of manners can help the individual to place himself in relation to society as a whole, rather than just within his own family or group. Whether Jane Austen thought that Anne would be able to perform this task or, even more important, whether society would ever again be sufficiently unified for the language of manners to be generally understood, is debatable. Certainly, her only post-Persuasion work, Sanditon, in which both the Parkers and Lady Denham have abandoned the values of the old order in favour of an acquisitive ethic, would seem to indicate that she was now concerned with charting the disintegration of her world rather than with seeking means by which it might be regenerated.

However, whatever Persuasion might indicate about Jane Austen's awareness of the social changes of her period, it does serve to complete her comprehensive analysis of the

role of manners in society. In Persuasion, Jane Austen emphasises more clearly than ever before, not only that manners are meaningless unless they reflect a set of moral values, but also that while the communal ideal can survive so long as the basic social lessons taught within the familial context are not forgotten, it cannot realise its full potential unless the importance of manners as a medium for communication is understood. By being forced to rely upon the chance occurrence of situations sufficiently testing to prove her worth to the Musgroves, Harvilles and, above all, Wentworth, Anne finds herself placed in a much more precarious situation than any of Jane Austen's other heroines. While a Marianne Dashwood or an Emma Woodhouse achieve perfect harmony with their worlds once they have corrected personal faults, Anne Elliot, the most mature of the heroines, must rely to a large extent on luck for the removal of confusion and misunderstanding. In Emma, Jane Austen suggests that such dramatic actions as Frank Churchill's rescue of Harriet Smith from the gypsies are too unusual to provide any reliable guide to character, yet, in order to contrive a happy ending for Persuasion, she is forced to rely upon a child's broken collar-bone and a young woman's fall to provide her heroine with sufficient opportunities to assert herself. The value of manners, and of the formal social occasion, the medium through which they are most readily demonstrated, is thus shown most clearly in a novel in which they are able to play little part.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

H. W. Garrod, who argues that Jane Austen's failure to vary her basic plot constitutes one of her major limitations, is guilty of ignoring both the archetypal quality of, as he describes them, her stories of "husband-hunts" and the very different effects that she is able to achieve within this reiterated framework. Whereas Garrod claims that she should have expanded horizontally, by drawing on a wider range of social classes and by giving more attention to natural description,² Jane Austen, in fact, expanded vertically, by approaching a single situation from many different angles. Thus, while it is true that every novel is about the attempts of a young woman of genteel origin to find a husband or, in broader terms, to make the transition from the childhood to the adult world, each heroine has to contend with very different personal and social problems. Jane Austen's heroines can indeed, as Garrod further argues, be reduced to two major types, the "Girl of Spirit" and the "Tame Girl,"³ Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse falling into the first category, and Catherine Morland, Fanny Price and Anne Elliot into the second. However, the differences between them are more important than the similarities. Thus, as I have tried to show in my discussion of the novels, the first

of the spirited girls, Marianne Dashwood, is faced with the problem of learning to understand that the individual's sensibility does not provide an adequate guide to the whole of experience, the second, Elizabeth Bennet, is unable to comprehend that she must reach out beyond her own group and include the aristocracy in her sphere of concern, and the third, Emma Woodhouse, is led into repeated errors and improprieties by her failure to behave responsibly towards anyone beyond the Hartfield, Randalls, Donwell Abbey circle. Similarly, Catherine Morland lacks the maturity to realise that not everyone lives up to her own high moral standards, Fanny Price is called upon to acquire sufficient social charms to become a source of moral influence, and the fully mature Anne Elliot needs to find people who can understand her worth. Thus, the Girls of Spirit fall short of their society's gentlemanly ideals because, in their different ways, they do not recognise the needs of others, and the Tame Girls because, while they are aware of these needs, they are unable to serve them.

The uniqueness of these six heroines is further reinforced by the very different social situations in which each is placed. While Garrod is correct in asserting that all of Jane Austen's novels, with the exception of Northanger Abbey, are centred on village communities,⁴ he is wrong in claiming that each of these communities is the same. The worlds of Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility are relatively simple ones in which Catherine Morland and Marianne Dashwood

are faced with a straightforward choice between the forces of virtue, as represented by the Tilneys and Colonel Brandon, and those of vice, as represented by the Thorpes and Willoughby, but those of the later novels are extremely complex and varied. Thus, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse are located within communities that differ in almost every way, Longbourn, embracing, as it does, bourgeois and aristocratic, as well as genteel, elements, being the most fluid of Jane Austen's social milieus, and Highbury, into which few outsiders have ever strayed, being the most static. Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, on the other hand, are both called upon to deal with worlds that have deviated seriously from the gentlemanly ideal. However, even here there is a radical difference because, whereas Mansfield Park is eventually regenerated through the efforts of Fanny Price, Kellynch is so far beyond redemption that Anne Elliot is forced to move permanently outside of its boundaries.

While this thesis has been concerned in detail with demonstrating the differences between the novels, and thus with establishing the full complexity of Jane Austen's statement about the correct relationship that should exist between the individual and his group, it has not been my intention to deny that they do have a certain repetitive quality. Indeed, in spite of Garrod's arguments to the contrary, it is my contention that the source of Jane Austen's greatness is to be found in her realisation of the advantages to be gained from placing all of her heroines in initiate situations. By

dealing with the young woman's transition from adolescence to maturity, Jane Austen is at once able to focus on a moment in the relationship of the particular individual and his society during which the worth of both is fully tested and which thus serves admirably to convey her narrow social themes, and to re-create the basic pattern of all myth, ritual and fairytale. Although the heroines are tested through the quality of their manners rather than through battles with dragons, and although these tests take place in the ballroom or round the dinner table rather than in dark forests or in the underworld, the final statement of faith in the individual's ability to cross the thresholds of life and to enter into a condition of perfect harmony with the world around him that arises out of these tales of genteel life is no less profound than is that which is made by the myth or the fairytale. Rather than being conventional endings that contradict the pervasively realistic tone of her novels, Jane Austen's final claims that her newly married heroes and heroines have achieved perfect happiness arise organically out of their basic ritualistic cum mythical structure.

By combining within the framework of each of her novels something so basic as an initiation ritual and something as sophisticated as a thorough examination of the demands made on the individual by the conditions of life in eighteenth-century English village society, Jane Austen appeals at once to the reader's deepest unconscious impulses and to his highest aesthetic and intellectual faculties.

Although this thesis was not intended to be in any sense a consistent rebuttal of Garrod's "Depreciation," by examining the development of the structure of formal social occasions which serves to carry the burden of the theme of initiation, I have inevitably demonstrated, as have many others,⁵ the inaccuracy of his claim that Jane Austen's later novels are not more mature than her earliest works.⁶ Since Garrod believed that Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility were Jane Austen's first two novels, it would have been impossible, of course, for him to have traced any consistent development in her art. However, it is extremely difficult to understand how he failed to recognise that such works as Mansfield Park and Emma are superior in almost every way to Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility. Thus, just as, for example, her ironic mode of presentation and her depiction of characters developed new facets as she progressed from novel to novel, so did Jane Austen make increasingly subtle use of the formal social occasion. Although Northanger Abbey is structurally rather more satisfactory than Sense and Sensibility, neither of Jane Austen's first two novels makes the best possible use of the individual scene, or patterns these scenes in such a way as to carry the main burden of the action. However, in so far as it includes two extremely effective scenes, in the first of which Catherine's sense of exclusion from the adult world is reflected by her inability to find a place amongst any of the individual parties that make up the totality of the ballroom crowd, and

in the second of which Henry Tilney draws his justly famous analogy between the dance and marriage, and in so far as the main stages in the development of the two lovers' relationship can be charted around the five balls that they attend, Northanger Abbey does suggest something of Jane Austen's later achievement. Thus, Pride and Prejudice, which is generally considered to be Jane Austen's first mature work, is characterised by a pervasive and aesthetically pleasing patterning of scenes. The opening movement, which is concerned with the choosing of partners, is organised, appropriately, around a series of dances, and the closing, during which Elizabeth and Darcy are called upon to learn the value of each other's worlds, around visits to the new moral environments of Rosings and Pemberley. Although many of its scenes, particularly during that part of the action which is set at Netherfield, are extremely short, Pride and Prejudice nevertheless possesses a sense of unity lacking to either Northanger Abbey or Sense and Sensibility because the approach and rejection pattern that characterises the whole of Elizabeth's relationship with Darcy is to be found even during their briefest formal encounters. The achievement of Mansfield Park and Emma is rather different from that of Pride and Prejudice. Whereas the earlier novel gains its effects from a patterning of scenes, the later make use of a limited number of very fully realised set-pieces. Thus, much of the important action of Mansfield Park is bulked into a few vital incidents such as the excursion to Sotherton, the amateur theatricals and Fanny's visit to Portsmouth, while the development

of Emma's relationship with her community can only be properly understood if her conduct during the novel's six crucial formal social occasions is examined. By grouping together her characters on a few extremely significant occasions, Jane Austen is able to convey a much clearer sense of the interplay between the heroine and her world in Mansfield Park and Emma than she was in any of her three earlier novels. Indeed, so important does Fanny's world become to Rubinstein that he argues that "the protagonist of Mansfield Park is Mansfield itself."⁷ Similarly, as I pointed out in my discussion of Emma, several critics have commented on the completeness of Jane Austen's depiction of Highbury.⁸ Although Jane Austen was compelled by the exigencies of her subject to organise Persuasion around visits rather than formal social occasions, she was too aware of the importance of the fully realised incident by this stage in her career to revert to the methods of her early novels. Thus, in addition to establishing a very clear distinction between the novel's two mutually exclusive moral environments by moving Anne from the decaying world of Kellynch to the healthy communities of Uppercross and Lyme before returning her briefly to that source of futile amusements, Bath, Jane Austen groups her protagonists together on several occasions. The most important of these are the walk to Winthrop, the scene on the Cobb, and the occasion of Anne's first visit to the White Hart during which the Musgroves, Crofts, and Wentworth are brought into direct contact with Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot.

Thus, it is the contention of this thesis that, far from being merely an accurate recorder of the trivial events of village life, as most early commentators assumed, or even, as many modern critics claim, simply a skilful ironist who lacks any real awareness of the depths of the soul, Jane Austen is an extremely mature artist who is at once capable of giving dramatic life to a peculiarly eighteen-century conservative view of experience and of reiterating the basic patterns of all myth. It is because of the seriousness of her concerns, both universal and particular, and because of the subtlety of the structure in which she embodies them, that Jane Austen must be granted a position of great importance in the history of the English novel.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 1: Introduction

¹"Jane Austen's Critics," Critical Quarterly, V (1963), 49-63.

²(1816), 248-249. Reprinted in Southam, ed., Jane Austen, 72.

³"Charlotte Brontë on Jane Austen, 1848, 1850," in Southam, ed., Jane Austen, 126.

⁴Ibid.

⁵"Jane Austen: A Depreciation," Essays by Divers Hands: The Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, VIII (1928), 29.

⁶"Emma. A Dissenting Opinion," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, IV (1949), 1-20; "The Neighbourhood of Tombuctoo: Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels," in Southam, ed., Critical Essays, 182-199.

⁷Quoted from Lascelles, Jane Austen and Her Art, 135-136.

⁸"Mark Twain, Jane Austen and the Imagination of Society," in Brower and Poirier, eds., In Defense of Reading, 282-309.

⁹Jane Austen's Novels, 5. Quoted from "Manners, Morals and the Novel," in The Liberal Imagination, 211-212.

¹⁰"Jane Austen and 'The Quiet Thing'--A Study of Mansfield Park," in Southam, ed., Critical Essays, 159.

¹¹"Emma: The Awakening from Innocence," ELH, XXI (1954), 39.

¹²Jane Austen's Novels.

¹³"The Myth in Jane Austen," American Imago, II (1942), 197-204.

¹⁴"Emma and Miss Bates: Early Experience of Separation and The Theme of Dependency in Jane Austen's Novels," Studies in English Literature, IX (1969), 383.

¹⁵"Structure and Idea in Jane Austen's Persuasion," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, VIII (1954), 272-289.

¹⁶A Reading of "Mansfield Park," 58-64; "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," Scrutiny, VIII (1940), 355-362.

¹⁷Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 10.

¹⁸The Rites of Passage, 3.

¹⁹Ibid., 10-11.

²⁰The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 246. Campbell is not, of course, unique in drawing parallels between myth and ritual. Stanley Edgar Hyman, "The Ritual View of Myth and the Mythic," in Sebeok, ed., Myth. A Symposium, 84-94, traces the development of this school of thought. Other interesting studies of the subject are provided by Lord Raglan, "Myth and Ritual," in Sebeok, ed., Myth. A Symposium, 76-83, and Northrop Frye, "New Directions From Old," in Murray, ed., Myth and Mythmaking, 115-131. However Campbell presents a much fuller discussion of the subject than any of these critics and is very successful in reconciling his particular approach with those of other scholars, such as Müller, Durkheim, Jung, Freud and Coomaraswamy who also believe that myth has an important role to play in the life of the individual and his community.

²¹The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 246.

²²The Decline of the Gentleman, 26.

²³Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 24, claims that John Chamberlyne's Magnae Britanniae Notitia, from which this definition of the gentleman derives, was the most popular eighteenth-century handbook about Britain.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Chapman, Jane Austen, 198-199, goes so far as to claim that "The class to which Jane Austen and her Bertrams belonged regarded the aristocracy with suspicious hostility."

²⁶Raven, The Decline of the Gentleman, 9, 62, distinguishes between the "gentleman" and the "upper class" person on the grounds that the former has a conception of duty, the latter only of privilege.

²⁷See ibid., 27, where Raven points out that "It has always been possible to attain gentility by skill in arms."

²⁸Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century, 209, says, "The country house, Professor Habukkuk has remarked, was the hub of the landlord's existence. It was the house which gave his family status, a sense of identity, of achievement, and of permanence." F. M. L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, 1, makes a similar generalisation about the carriage when he remarks, "For as long as the horse and carriage were the symbols of social standing, and possession of stables and grooms the sign of a prosperous competence, the English landed aristocracy retained its predominant place."

²⁹"First Letter on a Regicide Peace," Works, V, 208.

³⁰"Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol," Works, II, 11.

³¹The Social Construction of Reality, 80.

³²See Turbeville, English Men and Manners, 117-124, for an account of Nash's career.

³³The Social Dances, 22-23.

³⁴Quoted from Bayne-Powell, Travellers in Eighteenth-Century England, 136-137.

³⁵Craik, Jane Austen, 116-119, Liddell, The Novels of Jane Austen, 73-76, and Wiesenfarth, The Errand of Form, 92-95, give particular attention to the Sotherton episode. The theatricals are examined in detail by Donoghue, "A View of Mansfield Park," in Southam, ed., Critical Essays, 43-44, Fleishman, A Reading of "Mansfield Park", 24-29, Litz, Jane Austen, 122-129, and Tanner, "Jane Austen and the 'Quiet Thing'--A Study of Mansfield Park," in Southam, ed., Critical Essays, 152-156.

Chapter II: Northanger Abbey

¹Jane Austen, 11.

²Jane Austen, 58-67.

³Jane Austen, 53.

⁴"Comedy in Northanger Abbey," Modern Language Review, LXIII (1968), 805.

⁵Burney, Evelina, 33.

⁶The Morphology of the Folktale, 92.

Chapter III: Sense and Sensibility

¹The Truth-tellers, 160-166; Jane Austen, 60-93.

²Mudrick, Jane Austen, 60.

³While my main interest in this chapter is necessarily focused on Marianne, the young woman who moves from the childhood to the adult world, it should not be forgotten that, besides guiding her sister towards maturity, Elinor has an independently heroic role to play in Sense and Sensibility in that her virtues are thoroughly tested by her response to the trying situation in which she is placed.

⁴English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century, 137.

⁵In addition to Mudrick, Jane Austen, 60, whose criticism of Colonel Brandon has already been cited, Litz, Jane Austen, 81-82, and Watt, "On Sense and Sensibility," Afterword to his edition of Sense and Sensibility, 308, express dissatisfaction with this character.

⁶Laski, Jane Austen and her World, 17, 23, notes that at least two of Jane Austen's acquaintances, George Hastings and Mrs. Cooper, died of this ailment.

Chapter IV: Pride and Prejudice

¹Jane Austen and Her Art, 160.

²"Jane Austen and the Dance of Fidelity and Complaisance," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XV (1959), 119.

³The Social Dances, 46.

⁴See Rubinstein, Jane Austen's Novels, 75-76, for a full discussion of this aspect of Sense and Sensibility.

⁵See Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 17-62, for a definition of the distinctions between these three classes.

⁶"Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice in the Eighteenth-Century Mode," University of Toronto Quarterly, XVI (July, 1947), 364.

⁷See Pride and Prejudice, 380, for a full discussion between Elizabeth and Darcy of the value to be attached to her response to him.

⁸Elizabeth's manners must be termed "bad," not simply because she makes ironic comments to Darcy, but because she is aware that he understands the point of them. Other of Jane Austen's heroines, such as Elinor Dashwood in her conversation with John Dashwood, indulge themselves in a similar mode of response but always try to ensure that the butt of their humour fails to grasp the point being made. Irony in polite conversation is thus justifiable as a means of sublimating a sense of aggression towards the person with whom one is talking, but not as a means of passing private insults to one individual, the point of which are hidden to the rest of the company.

⁹"Gravity," as Raven, The Decline of the Gentleman, 26, points out, is one of the main qualifications of the gentleman and must be granted the broad implications of the Roman concept of "gravitas," which can be translated as "moral weight."

¹⁰Jane Austen's criticism of Darcy's feudal view of the relationship between the classes is underlined by the similarities between his proposal and Lord B--'s equally condescending one in Pamela. See E. E. Duncan-Jones, "Proposals of Marriage in Pride and Prejudice and Pamela," Notes and Queries, CCII (1957), 76, for a discussion of this point.

Chapter V: Mansfield Park

¹Jane Austen, 179.

²"Mansfield Park," in The Opposing Self, 212.

³"What Became of Jane Austen? Mansfield Park," The Spectator, No. 6745, (Oct. 4, 1957), 340.

⁴"Jane Austen and 'The Quiet Thing'--A Study of Mansfield Park," in Southam, ed., Critical Essays, 137.

⁵"Mansfield Park," in The Opposing Self, 211; Jane Austen, 128.

⁶Sister M. Lucy Schneider, C. S. J. discusses fully the symbolic implications of these two rooms in "The Little White Attic and the East Room: Their Function in Mansfield Park," Modern Philology, LXIII (1966), 227-235.

⁷A Reading of "Mansfield Park", 61.

⁸The Novels of Jane Austen, 75; Jane Austen, 116; Jane Austen, 155.

⁹Q. D. Leavis, "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings: II. Lady Susan into Mansfield Park," Scrutiny, X, ii (1941), 114-142, and X, iii (1942), 272-294, goes so far as to argue that Lady Susan is the source of Mansfield Park.

¹⁰By using the same metaphor, but slightly shifting her perspective, Jane Austen also employs the conversation about improvements to reiterate her criticisms of Dr. Grant. Grant, it appears, has altered his garden to shut out the churchyard, just as in his own life he has established a strict division between the temporal and spiritual aspects of experience.

¹¹Fleishman, A Reading of "Mansfield Park", 23-29, summarises the various objections that might be made to Lovers' Vows. He emphasises particularly the revolutionary implications of the play, but Fanny was probably more concerned about the plot, which involves seduction and illegitimacy.

¹²Jane Austen, 168-169.

¹³Mudrick, for example, *ibid.*, 165, sees the ending as a "grotesque makeshift" designed to tidy up a plot that has got out of hand.

Chapter VI: Emma

¹Craik, Jane Austen, 50, claims that Emma, "using only the inhabitants of one small village, has a wider social grasp and moral implication" than Sense and Sensibility, the most obviously panoramic of all Jane Austen's novels. Lascelles, Jane Austen and Her Art, 179-180, also remarks on the completeness of the Highbury world.

²Lascelles, Jane Austen and Her Art, 197-198, argues that the many silent characters who inhabit the village help to give Jane Austen's fictional world its sense of perspective and completeness.

⁶Although Emma declares on one occasion that she is miserable because "South End is prohibited" (101) to her, she does not display any real desire to visit the seaside during the rest of the novel.

³"Emma," Encounter, VIII, vi (1957), 56-59; Jane Austen's Novels, 161-163.

⁴Trilling, "Emma," 58.

⁵"Jane Austen's Emma: The Truths and Disguises of Human Disclosure," in Brower and Poirier, eds., In Defense of Reading, 238. Cited by Rubinstein, Jane Austen's Novels, 162.

⁷Shannon, "Emma: Character and Construction," PMLA, LXXI (1956), 646-650, comments on this structural principle.

⁸"Jane Austen's Emma: The Truths and Disguises of Human Disclosure," in Brower and Poirier, eds., In Defense of Reading, 242.

⁹Jane Austen's Novels, 163.

Chapter VII: Persuasion

¹The Truthtellers, 166-172; Jane Austen, 207-240; "Learning Experience and Change," in Southam, ed., Critical Essays, 80-82.

²Jane Austen, 153-155; "Structure and Idea in Jane Austen's Persuasion," 272-289.

³"Structure and Idea in Jane Austen's Persuasion," 289.

⁴Excellent studies of this aspect of Sanditon have been produced by W. R. Martin, "The Subject of Jane Austen's Sanditon," English Studies in Africa, X (1967), 87-93, and Southam, Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts, 100-135.

⁵"Structure and Idea in Jane Austen's Persuasion," 277.

⁶Jane Austen and Her Art, 181.

⁷For a full discussion of the importance of "nothingness" in Persuasion, see Clarke, A Study of the Family, 110-188.

⁸"Jane Austen and the Dance of Fidelity and Complaisance," 134-135.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion

¹"Jane Austen: A Depreciation," 32.

²Ibid., 33-34.

³Ibid., 35.

⁴Ibid., 34.

⁵For example, Craik, Jane Austen, Litz, Jane Austen and Rubinstein, Jane Austen's Novels, all show, although in rather different ways, that Jane Austen's skills increased considerably during her artistic career.

⁶"Jane Austen: A Depreciation," 28.

⁷Jane Austen's Novels, 110.

⁸See above, p. 197.

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